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A Critical Assessment of Euthanasia

By Stephen Ainsah-Mensah

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The question of whether, say, a man should have the right to take away his life granted pain and suffering have overcome him is a very important question today. A different way of putting this question is this: 'Should a man have the right to take away his life if he ceases to function as a human being?' This matter would have been laid to rest had it not been that it strikes at the heart of law, key matters of health, and morality. It is a subject that, if not properly addressed, can cause some nasty consequences to the lives of people and pose unwarranted danger to the stability of a society.

The present question bears the amazing name "euthanasia". Those who think that a man, for instance, has the right to take away his life under the condition stated may have some important points to put forward. Yet their points, upon closer inspection, could be seen to be overtly subjective, and, hence, moot.

A man - call him John - should have the right to function properly and contribute, in whichever form, to the collective movement of life. When this primary function is taken away, it ought not bring about a burden to people close to him or to others bearing no direct relation to him. But if his awful suffering prompts others to direct much of their time into taken care of him, then the multiplying effects are huge. The patient in question suffers severely and the others in question suffer mentally and emotionally.

Consider the three children of John who are engaged in skilled jobs. Their respective companies prize them as essential toward the general success of the company. But following the terminal illness of John, they have to spend much time in looking after him. One can see that this state of affair weighs heavily on the creative capacity of John's children. Most likely, it would sting their emotional and mental health as well as their respective financial capacities. Furthermore, if matters of health in the society are largely supported by the state, then much money has to be spent on John to help sustain his life. In fact, the moral bases of these actions are in keeping with the fundamental tenets of human rights. Should the state or John's children do otherwise, one could reasonably argue that the bestial character had controlled the conscience, so too passion. And this would have set a dangerous

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precedent since the easiness of self-centered life is sometimes valued far more than a hard life full of moral, legal and logical alertness. Most likely, others would follow the morally deficient example set by John's children or the state; and to what extent their actions could be justified would be very hard to estimate. In this light, it is, indeed, very hard to put forward a straightforward answer in favour or against euthanasia.

If one ponders over the role the helpless patient plays in euthanasia, many questions compete for selection. Is John in the right emotional and mental condition to endorse his "compassionate" killing? Are his close relations in agreement with him that he should "compassionately" die? How can one sufficiently ascertain - bitter as this may seem - that John's close relations have not conspired to end his life in order to ease their own (individual) disproportionate stresses in looking after him? In short, who should be trusted when the matter at hand refers to ending a person's life through another agent, whether an expert or a lame person? And even if a medical expert approves, generally, of euthanasia and the specific case of John, how could one determine the motive at stake so as to free euthanasia of

any element of suspicion?

It is in confronting such questions that it becomes difficult to justify euthanasia on logical, legal and moral grounds even though some specific instances may be claimed to warrant euthanasia. For assuming the agent himself, say, John, ended his life through his own doing and not through any agent, then one may, fairly quickly, conclude that he did the right thing in order to put excruciating pain to final rest.

Careful thought casts some doubts on the personal action of John. One can, for instance, ask whether John was in the right frame of mind prior to ending his own life or whether he was emotionally stable. And to say that the condition of John is irrelevant to judge the rightness or wrongness of his action may be foolish. It amounts, by a parallel reasoning, to saying that any individual knows best what condition he or she is in and has the sole privilege in correcting that condition, either to enhance life or terminate it. But this contention goes against the fundamentals of reasoning. It is purely a personal contention and does not submit itself to an objective scrutiny in order to free it of crude biases and moral dishonor.

Since one can choose to do to one's own life what one pleases - because of the subjective character of inward life - one could equally claim that it should not matter what kind of person wants to terminate life: a mad or sane person, a minor or an adult, an idiot or a sage, and so on. From this viewpoint, one can see that the previous contention is baseless. Abnormality of any form should not be sanctioned or unduly promoted. That is why people who lack the standard human disposition are often seen as having trodden the path of gross errors and need to be corrected by appropriate means without fail. Danger awaits the society if abnormal persons or premature persons are granted the personal right - not freedom - to take away their own lives, either by themselves or through the mediation of agents. This brings to the fore the point that the sufferer acted, not according to a clear conscience or a composed will-power, but under some kind of pressure, either by being persuaded to end his/her life or by persuading himself/herself. The sufferer, in other words, did not have all the available options at his/her disposal from which to make the ultimate rational choice about the issue of compassionate death. But suppose all the available options were at the sufferer's disposal, it still might not be morally proper to end life as an interventionist procedure was induced.

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Think about the point that modern society is full of scientific–technological facilities that have added a lot of sophistication to the movement of life. A person's life–threatening disease could be artificially controlled or manipulated by using complex machines or genetically engineered medication. Simply applying the sophistication just stated could definitively end a person's life–threatening disease. The moral dilemma that euthanasia brings about in this sense is largely connected to the question of manipulating a condition that leads to the death of the victim. Why should not death be allowed to occur naturally, thereby concluding that what happened was a noble death, a death in dignity? It seems clear that to tamper with this arguable noble death, by artfully and artificially facilitating it, is not in keeping with the natural play of human decency. It is an endeavour that may hint at the progress and development of science and technology; but if issues about cloning are morally questionable, therefore quite a threat to the harmonization of social life, then euthanasia may be viewed in like manner in spite of the scientific–technological creativities that may be advanced in its favour.

Euthanasia may engender the proliferation of all kinds of experiments about medication and medical equipment intended to justify the most effective means of stirring up mercy killing. Such practices will not serve the general interest of the society, for the issue of fame and profit may outweigh the question of selflessness. For example, the medical expert may not engage in the straightforward job of

facilitating meaningful death in accordance with the patient's wish, by an act of endorsement, directly or indirectly. The said expert may be more interested in the undeclared motive of testing a medical theory or/and the efficacy of a new drug on the victim. Once success in this area is confirmed, he/she may then continue to nourish the ego and the intellect with more experimentation on many other victims.

The question, then, ought to, finally, be confronted: Should moral, logical and legal matters resolve the rightness or wrongness of euthanasia? Or, should medical and scientific–technological issues decide the rightness or wrongness of euthanasia? If we go by the second point, then we can argue persuasively that it has been largely responsible for the evolution of human beings into the present form. And if the question of morality, law and logic were made to decide human evolution, then we, most likely, would not have been able to reach our current station in terms of advancement. But we are dealing with crucial issues about life and death, and the question of whether euthanasia is right or wrong must, for the present, lie unresolved. Perhaps, since there is no clear–cut answer to this question, the question itself need not be topical; nor should it proliferate. Those who want to practise euthanasia may then be censured.

Mr. Stephen Ainsah–Mensah is a Canadian Educator, Race Relations Consultant, Writer, and Community Projects Coordinator. He has worked in various capacities as an instructor at the post–secondary level in Business courses and Life Skills. Currently, he is the principal of Handan–Lilac Education Group in China.

How You Can Learn to be a Better Manager

By Chris Anderson

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When you first take over a department, expectations are usually high but operations are sometimes in disarray. The staff is disorganized, goals aren't being met, and hours are spent on unproductive tasks. Just when you think the company would never get on track, the CFO recommends that you learn more about something called operations assessment.

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Enhance your ability to predict and achieve measurable results Improve your focus on the processes that are truly important

For you there has never been a better time to learn the critical expertise your organization needs. In no time, the skills you learn give you the tools for the kind of effective business management that gets noticed!

Chris Anderson has over 18 years of sales, marketing and business management experience working with business process design, software and systems engineering. He is also co-author of policies and

procedures manual products, producing the layout, process design and implementation to increase performance. He is currently the Managing Director of Bizmanualz, Inc.

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