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Playing God With Life and Death

Very Dangerous Trend

When I was back in Bible college, I had an English class, and I had to write a paper. For some reason I decided to write about abortion and euthanasia and their connection. I based my writing on a book by a former Surgeon General of the US, C. Edward Koop, *The Right To Live; The Right To Die*. At the time which was back in the 1980s the thought of assisted suicide was being floated seriously. At the heart of the issue at the time was a case that made it all the way to the Supreme Court of New Jersey, the case of a young woman named Karen Ann Quinlan. Karen Ann unexpectedly went into a coma and the hospital elected to artificially keep her alive rather than let her condition run a natural course. Her parents reached a point where they wanted to remove her from the respirator she was on and, in their minds, die. The right to make that call sparked a flurry of conversations over the right to live or die being a personal one, one that only the individual can and should make. Ultimately the case was decided unanimously that her parents could make the call, and they removed her breathing assistance. Surprisingly, Karen Ann lived for another 10 years before dying from pneumonia. Still, the right to end her life on her own terms is still being debated even now.

Two More States

Just this month, the governors of both New York and Illinois approved bills that will allow physician-assisted suicide as we read in an article from *Harbingers Daily*:

Within a single week, the governors of Illinois and New York both announced their support for physician-assisted suicide legislation. In Illinois, Governor JB Pritzker (D) signed a bill legalizing the practice last Friday. In New York, Governor Kathy Hochul (D) announced yesterday that she has reached an agreement with the state legislature and will sign the Medical Aid in Dying Act in January 2026. With these developments, Illinois and New York join 11 other states and Washington, D.C., that have already authorized physician-assisted suicide.

In the case of New York, Governor Kathy Hochul justified the move this way:

Governor Hochul explained her decision in a personal essay published shortly before her Wednesday press conference. She noted that bodily autonomy ultimately shaped her thinking about the bill: "I have come to this as a matter of individual choice that does not have to be about shortening life but rather about shortening death," she wrote.

Hochul, who identifies as Catholic, also framed her reasoning in theological terms, saying she reflected on what she has learned about God. "I was taught that God is merciful and compassionate, and so must we be," she wrote. "This includes permitting a merciful option to those facing the unimaginable and searching for comfort in their final months in this life."

Of course, both bills have guardrails in them, guardrails they both maintain will keep the process from being used immorally, or so they say. The article rightly notes that other nations who have right to die laws rarely stick to those guardrails:

In short, lawmakers in Illinois and New York will champion their new laws and defend them by pointing to the safeguards they have put in place. But history shows that such guardrails rarely hold. In countries that have adopted physician-assisted suicide, restrictions requiring terminal

diagnoses are eventually loosened, distinctions between physical suffering and psychiatric suffering disappear, and protections for minors are removed over time. Ultimately, these restrictions cannot last because a worldview rooted in radical bodily autonomy eventually demands the elimination of every constraint on personal choice.

It's a tough issue, you know, playing God with life and death, but as mortals we think we can handle it. Or can we?

A Culture Of Death

As Christians we do have counsel on such decisions, whether they are about end-of-life decisions for adults or about ending life in the womb before the unborn child ever gets a chance to breathe one single breath of air. In an article on the topic of euthanasia from *gotquestions.org* we get good advice about this touchy topic:

Euthanasia, sometimes called "mercy killing," can be a difficult issue. On one hand, we do not want to take a person's life into our own hands and end it prematurely. On the other hand, we do not want to prolong the process of dying more than necessary—that is, we want to preserve life, but not prolong death. At what point do we simply allow a person to die and take no further action to extend his or her life?

The article gets right to the point of the medical world giving death some help:

A related issue is that of assisted suicide. Essentially, a person seeking assisted suicide is seeking to euthanize himself, with the aid of another person to ensure that death is quick and painless. The person assisting the suicide facilitates death by making preparations and furnishing the needed equipment; but the person seeking death is the one who actually initiates the process. By taking a "hands-off" approach to the death itself, the facilitator seeks to avoid charges of murder. Proponents of assisted suicide try for a positive spin by using terms like "death with dignity." But "death with dignity" is still death, "assisted suicide" is still suicide, and suicide is wrong. We live in what is sometimes described as a "culture of death." Abortion on demand has been practiced for decades. Now some are seriously proposing infanticide. And euthanasia is promoted as a viable means of solving various social and financial problems. This focus on death as an answer to the world's problems is a total reversal of the biblical model. Death is an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). Life is a sacred gift from God (Genesis 2:7). When given the choice between life and death, God told Israel to "choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Euthanasia spurns the gift and embraces the curse.

Aren't we then making the case for assisted killing at any point of life? I think we're there now and the future isn't looking too bright now. Again, who should be in charge of who lives and who dies?

Turning To God

As we should always do, we need to look to the Creator on this and fortunately, He does have an opinion on it:

The overriding truth that God is sovereign drives us to the conclusion that euthanasia and assisted suicide are wrong. We know that physical death is inevitable for us mortals (Psalm 89:48; Hebrews 9:27). However, God alone is sovereign over when and how a person's death occurs. Job testifies in Job 30:23, "I know you will bring me down to death, to the place appointed for all the living." Ecclesiastes 8:8 declares, "No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death." God has the final say over death (see

1 Corinthians 15:26, 54–56; Hebrews 2:9, 14–15; Revelation 21:4). Euthanasia and assisted suicide are man's attempts to usurp that authority from God.

Well, there you have it. But before we close the book on this, we need to examine that there are emotions and personal heartache when contemplating the alternative to assisted suicide:

Death is a natural occurrence. Sometimes God allows a person to suffer for a long time before death occurs; other times, a person's suffering is cut short. No one enjoys suffering, but that does not make it right to determine that a person should die. Often, God's purposes are made known through suffering. "When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other" (Ecclesiastes 7:14). Romans 5:3 teaches that tribulations bring about perseverance. God cares about those who cry out for death and wish to end their suffering. God gives purpose in life even to the end. Only God knows what is best, and His timing, even in the matter of one's death, is perfect.

In my term paper I mention that such decisions must not be based on quality of life but sanctity of life. If we must err, it should be on the side of saving lives. The problem is that technology can keep someone alive for longer and longer amounts of time meaning we can prevent a death that should have ended naturally. Koop, in his book says that the seminal moment is when the choice of putting someone on life support is made. He says that once life support is started it shouldn't be stopped. The *gotquestions.org* article ends with this advice, though:

We should never seek to prematurely end a life, but neither must we go to extraordinary means to preserve a life. To actively hasten death is wrong; to passively withhold treatment can also be wrong; but to allow death to occur naturally in a terminally ill person is not necessarily wrong. Anyone facing this issue should pray to God for wisdom (James 1:5). And we should all remember the words of former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, who warned that the practice of medicine "cannot be both our healer and our killer" (from KOOP, The Memoirs of America's Family Doctor by C. Everett Koop, M.D., Random House, 1991). C. Everett Koop, M.D., Random House, 1991).