

The New Utopia

It has no room for the disabled or the suffering

Since the announcement in 1997 that Dolly the sheep had been cloned, biotechnology has generated controversy. Human cloning, stem-cell research, and other biotech developments now raise moral dilemmas that our parents and grandparents couldn't have imagined. But behind this new technology is a very old attitude - some lives are being classified as useful and others as expendable or "not worth living."

Already a force

Already in the United States and Canada euthanasia is enjoying perverse popularity. The 2004 Oscar winning film Million Dollar Baby portrayed euthanasia as something noble, even heroic - a boxing coach shows his love to his daughter-figure by euthanizing her after she becomes disabled.

In the Netherlands, on August 30, 2004, the Dutch judicial authorities and the Groninger University Clinic came to an agreement authorizing a protocol of experimentation which will extend the practice of euthanasia to children under age 12, to "liberate" them "from pain."

Abortion is also used to decide who should live and who should not, and in England it is often based on whether the unborn child will have any "quality of life." In 2004, an unborn English child 28 weeks old was aborted because new techniques for detecting fetal abnormalities indicated that the child had a cleft lip and palate - that was enough to brand the child as having a life not worth living. In Britain more babies with Down syndrome are aborted than are allowed to be born. In America more than 80 per cent of the babies diagnosed prenatal with Down syndrome are aborted.

Abortion and euthanasia form the bookends of this debate. Once the premise is granted that some lives are expendable, there is lethal logic that leads in due course to infanticide, euthanasia, genetic manipulation, and coercive reproduction policies. When the child in the womb - the place where she or he should be most protected - is legally expendable, those already born are threatened. If society is unwilling to protect the lives of unborn children, life for the born threatens to be an expendable commodity. Hence, abortion is still the issue for our world culture.

What's next?

Ideas always have consequences - what is taught at universities does filter down to everyday life in society. In our "enlightened" society the pagan practice of infanticide is now considered a legitimate practice by Princeton professor Peter Singer, America's leading bioethicist. He believes that infanticide is perfectly permissible within a person's first two years of life. He also argues that there is no point in keeping disabled old people alive because the elderly are no longer productive or useful to society.

Singer's argument is both new and old; he is promoting the idea today but it can be traced to the ancient past. Anthropologists have found that infanticide was quite common. The Eskimos (Inuit) would leave their infant children, especially girls, out to freeze to death. This was permitted completely at the parents' discretion: no social stigma was attached to it. And despite their great cultural and political achievements, the Romans also had a low view of life. Infanticide was "infamously universal" among them. Infants were killed for various reasons. Those born deformed or physically frail were especially prone to being willfully killed, often by drowning. The Roman statesman and writer Cicero (106-43 B.C.) justified infanticide, at least for the deformed, by citing the ancient *Twelve Tables of Roman Law*. He stated, "deformed infants shall be killed." The early Christians called this Greco-Roman practice of infanticide, murder. Singer's "new ethic" places him in the same league as these Romans and the ancient Eskimos.

The loss of moral absolutes

At the heart of Western culture's depreciation of human life is the rejection of its Judeo-Christian heritage. God is no longer relevant.

Human beings are now the measure of all things and there is nothing greater or more important than "we the people." But without God how can people determine what is right or wrong? Morals become only a matter of taste or opinion. Instead of holding to absolute moral standards, many speak of "moral preferences" or "lifestyle options." We are told to create our own values. What is right for me may be wrong for someone else. All judgments of evil are condemned as judgmental and evil themselves. We must be tolerant, we are told. We shouldn't judge others if our "created values" differ with "their values," if our choices clash with their choices. Indeed, tolerance has become the last undisputed virtue and the only moral absolute.

But society cannot survive without facing the fact there really are rights and wrongs. As Margaret Somerville put it in *The Ethical Canary: Science, Society and the Human Spirit.....* sometimes we need to face the fact of evil. To recognize evil might also be to recognize that some things are inherently wrong, and this is not a popular stance in societies as ours in which situational ethics is the predominant mode of values analysis."

Posthumanism

Underlying the denial of moral absolutes and their depreciation of human life is the belief that "the human species does not represent the end of our evolution but, rather, its beginning."

Some call this view "post-humanism" or "trans-humanism." Numerous academics, leaders in engineering, and the scientific establishment are taken in by the idea that human beings should engineer the next phase of evolution. The idea is that by seizing control of human evolution through bioengineering, human beings should be augmented and altered. People should not merely be allowed to change themselves through plastic

surgery, cyber-technology and the like, but they should have the right to control the destiny of their genes via progeny design and fabrication.

These worshippers at the altar of scientism usually also have an optimistic view of human nature, believing that people are inherently good and are on an ever-upward march to peace, prosperity, as well as on the move toward a new super race. Hence the attempt to have "designer babies" - enhanced for greater beauty, intelligence, strength, sports ability, musical talents or other attributes.

In other words, when people forsake God they try to act like gods. In his *book Facing Up To Evil In An Age of Genocide And Terror* Os Guinness observes: 'At the deepest level of all, modern evil that is part fantasy and part fanaticism grows from the heart of the modernist worldview: the drive of secular intellectuals to create and control a better world, purged of all defects and based only on reason, science, management, and our understanding of them all.'

Eugenics

If we can create life, why not dispose of it when we think it is necessary? Our culture's emphasis on the genetically "fit," combined with the power of genetic technology and our difficulty in embracing those who are "less fit," drives the movement to dispose of those deemed unsuitable for a meaningful life. This sends the unmistakable message that some people are worthy of life and others are not.

For example, a 1993 March of Dimes poll in the United States found that 11 per cent of parents said they would abort a fetus whose genome was predisposed to obesity. Four out of five would abort a fetus if it would grow up with a disability. Forty-three per cent said they would use genetic engineering if available simply to enhance their child's appearance.

The "new eugenic" movement has its origin in England and the United States, where it became a powerful force. The word eugenics, formed from two Greek roots, eu (good) and gen (birth) was coined by the nineteenth-century statistician Francis Galton to refer to selective breeding within human populations. Galton was a cousin to Charles Darwin and was influenced by Darwin's theory of natural selection. He believed that nations should discourage or impede childbearing by the destitute, the physically weak, the mentally ill, and others deemed unfit. Birth-control pioneer Margaret Sanger was one of his followers.

These eugenics advocates tried to improve the human race by enacting mandatory sterilization laws. Those deemed feeble-minded, indolent and licentious were sterilized, without their consent or against their wills. By the 1930s in the United States, most states had mandatory sterilization laws. In one well-known case, a young mentally-handicapped girl named Carrie Buck was given the "choice" either to be sterilized or to be returned to her asylum. Because both her mother and grandmother had been

mentally retarded, the famous jurist Oliver Wendell declared of Buck, "Three generations of imbeciles is enough" and mandated that she be sterilized.

We must resist the new eugenicists if we are to preserve the dignity of every human being. The Nazi's embracement of eugenics should be a warning for us all.

The Nazis

Postwar condemnations of the "nazification" of German science and medicine in the 1930s often ignored the pervasive belief in eugenics and its influence on policy in the rest of Europe. The Nazis derived their eugenic program from views widely held in the United States and elsewhere that supported the compulsory sterilization of the "feeble-minded." But the Nazis went much further to carry out their agenda of eugenic "cleansing" than those nations which dabbled in eugenic legislation. Nazi ideology rejected Germany's Christian root, refused to acknowledge God as the source of life and the criterion of the moral good. It was fuelled by "pseudo-scientific" theories of racial superiority, and "extremist forms of nationalism." Hitler and the Nazi leaders were ex-Christians and ex-Catholics. Those, including Hitler, who had Christian backgrounds vehemently rejected them. "We shall never come to terms with the Christian lie," he declared. "Our epoch will certainly see the end of the disease of Christianity. It will last another hundred years, two hundred years perhaps. My regret will have been that I couldn't, like whoever the prophet was, behold the promised land from afar." Hitler was driven by his dream of a new utopia, the self-perfecting state. He stated: "Those who see in National Socialism nothing more than a political movement know scarcely anything of it. It is more even than a religion: it is the will to create mankind anew." But in Hitler's zeal to create a new world, his movement became a human catastrophe, a killing ground.

Nazi ideology incorporated the notion of perfection, whether of people or the self-perfecting state. It is therefore not surprising that one feature of German medicine just prior to the Holocaust, was that it saw itself as having a valid and important role to play in the quest to perfect the German people.

Once the Nazis took power in Germany, they began the elimination of those they believed "inferior." In 1933 the forcible sterilization law was passed. In 1935, a marriage law was enacted, which required proof the couple's offspring would not be afflicted with disabling hereditary disease. And in 1938-39, eugenic sterilization was succeeded by euthanasia. The first victims were children. The test case was a baby born, who was physically and mentally handicapped, blind, with one leg and part of an arm missing. The child's parents requested a mercy killing. The petition was approved and authorized by Hitler, with instructions that similar cases could be handled in the same manner. Within a year, all children under three suffering from a variety of handicaps, including hydrocephalus, malformed limbs, and paralysis, were being executed, with or without parental consent. In October 1939, euthanasia was extended to older children and handicapped and mentally ill German adults. The calls for eugenics and euthanasia -

and the whole paraphernalia of the gas chambers - became an "exercise in the rational management of society."

Why did Nazi doctors become involved in euthanasia and medical experimentation on human beings? Why did they treat bodies of prisoners as scientific "material"? How could physicians-healers turn into murderers? They too were besotted by the dream of a new utopia. Robert Procter, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis*, the scholar whose work has most carefully probed the roots of Nazi scientific policy and practice, has noted, "On the one hand, the Nazis wanted to return to what they saw as the original, natural state of human life and society, on the other hand, Nazi medical authorities also wanted to breed a better human, and this prompted them to entertain radical measures to alter and 'improve' the course of human biological history."

Bearers of God's Image

Eugenics is evil because it holds that all people are not created equal. The question at the heart of our culture, therefore, is no longer about when life begins, but about what life is and whose right it is to make decisions about life and death. And what does it mean to be human?

Every member of the human race is a person. The value of life does not depend upon what a person can physically do, experience or achieve. The life of a comatose person or a fetus has the same dignity and worth as the life of a fully functioning adult. The care owed to every individual does not depend on either his age or the infirmity he may suffer.

More than ever we must uphold the Biblical view of man as the special creation of God. Without God, man is but a breath. Without ultimate reality in Him, life is absurd. Men and women are image bearers of God. They are not junk or disposable items. It is in the image of God that every human being has dignity. God is not made in our image; we are made in His. And there is no other ground for the preciousness and inalienable dignity of each human being. Will we recognize that every person, at whatever stage of development, is stamped with the very image of God (Gen. 1:26)?

The most glorious example of the dignity of every human being is the Incarnation. No matter how deficient, disabled, deaf, mute, sick, young or old, God so honored human life that He Himself assumed it becoming incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son (John 1:14). In Jesus of Nazareth we see "the Word made flesh"; and although Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried, then rose and ascended at the right hand of God, He has not laid down His human nature. Therefore, Christians do not hold human life to be cheap or expendable. Christians hold that from conception to natural death, human life is a sacred gift, granted by the Creator. They believe that this life must be honored, respected, and protected as a moral mandate. How do we treat the weak and disposable? Do we recognize them as bearing the image of God?

Conclusion

The current developments in biotechnology combined with the enchantment with the new eugenics movement should serve to awaken the Christian church to its responsibility to speak on behalf of those who have no voice, to defend human life at every age of development and in every mental and physical condition, and to confront the Culture of Death with wisdom, courage and conviction. There is no time to waste. If one member of the human race can be so devalued as to be considered unworthy of life, every single human life is effectively discounted.

But the church must do more than warn with words. In our time it has become more difficult to care than to cure. What an opportunity for Christians to minister! The sick, the handicapped etc. need treatment for their pain, emotional support from people who love them and care about them, and a way to find meaning in their suffering. What they need is a company of friends who will care even when they cannot cure, a communion of saints whose membership is stronger than death, and a Savior whose presence and promises of redemption abide even in "the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4).

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