

# The Assault On Medical Ethics

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## Prophets Of The Culture Of Death

It is a truism to say that cultural trends which begin in America will, in due course, reach Britain. It would be specious to argue that everything that comes from America is bad, but in the past, some examples – the spread of firearms, crack cocaine, the compensation culture- have, to put it mildly, been most undesirable. It is not surprising, therefore, that yet another unsavoury development is in the pipeline, of which we are so far comparatively, if not completely, oblivious. This can best be summed up as the 'Assault on Medical Ethics'. Wesley J Smith, author, columnist and attorney, has furnished us with a propitious warning in his book 'Culture of Death'.

'Culture of Death' is an account of the thinking and activities of a new wave of so-called 'Bioethicists', who are presently undermining the basic Christian and Hippocratic traditions of medical care. Even for American citizens, as Smith points out, the first time they become aware of their influence is when they or a loved one experience a crisis in their health. The movement itself has gathered momentum in the last decade or so, but there were, as always, spiritual precursors: in this case, among others, Margaret Sanger, the noted eugenicist, and Joseph Fletcher, famous for propounding the concept of situational ethics. The whole thrust of its ideology is based on the utilitarian principle that society is more important than the individual. As one protester put it, 'Utilitarianism is fast establishing itself as the new orthodoxy'.

## The New Bio-Ethics

Mr Smith reveals that many of the figures who are now shaping medical opinion in the United States are not themselves qualified at all, medically or otherwise. Those who are, often hold philosophy doctorates, which arguably enable them to conceal their inhumanity behind a veneer of abstract theory. One weapon at their command is to debase and obfuscate decent language. This has the dual effect of demeaning the value of the individual and degrading moral precepts that have been hallowed throughout the centuries. Their tactics have been enormously successful. They have infiltrated Universities, hospitals, research foundations and the media. They have written books, contributed to learned journals and toured lecture circuits until, at last, they have established for themselves a sort of ersatz respectability and status.

The advance in the fortunes of these new bioethicists has been much facilitated by a coincidental attitude towards suicide. There was a time when compassion in this matter meant, as far as possible, prevention. Nowadays, suicide is positively hailed as a solution to all kinds of problems; social, financial and mental. Mr Smith cites the example of Jack Kervorkian, the most notorious of all bioethicists. He eagerly championed assisted suicide and was widely acclaimed in respectable quarters of American society. Kervorkian

eventually went to jail for his part in the gruesome murder of a man whose kidneys were procured to be sold to the highest bidder. If he had had his way, not only would the organs of vulnerable people have been harvested for transplant, but also human experimentation and even vivisection would have been permitted. They may yet be.

The new bioethicists started out by expanding the boundaries of abortion. Having won the moral high ground as far as early embryonic termination was concerned, American doctors have graduated to the practice of Partial Birth Abortion. This is a method of killing a foetus of at least twenty week's gestation by inducing a premature birth, turning the baby round so it will come out feet first, then delivering all but the head. Smith chillingly completes the description; 'The doctor then pierces the skull with a sharp instrument and suctions out the brain, collapsing the skull so the head can be pulled completely out'.

#### From Abortion To Euthanasia

Advocates of this procedure maintain that it is only performed in a small number of cases where the baby is irremediably handicapped. But opponents have discovered that it is done quite often and when the baby is perfectly healthy. There is no statistical evidence that partial birth abortion takes place in this country at the moment, but like so much that is imported from the States, it is decidedly possible in the future.

The bioethicists then move on to euthanasia. They dwell endlessly on the theme of 'Futile Care Theory'. If an elderly, frail or sick person cannot be restored to sufficient health, such that they may enjoy a good 'quality of life', then, it is claimed, they should be left to die, or even helped to die. The fact that 'quality of life' is a purely subjective factor is given scant consideration. In Britain, adherence to this notion would only serve to consolidate the practice of withdrawing food and fluids, which has already gone on since the Bland judgement.

Those who approve of euthanasia, of course, applaud the oft-repeated maxim about the 'Right to Die'. This is now complemented by a further mantra, the 'Duty to Die'. The old are being softened up to relinquish life of their own volition. Those who become a financial or emotional burden, it is argued, should willingly opt to die so that the population levels may be stabilized and the economy prosper. Such a policy will inevitably generate ill-will, hatred and social division as those with expensive medical conditions are discriminated against.

#### Eugenics Gathers Momentum

From promoting euthanasia for the elderly, the modern bioethicists have surreptitiously encroached on the rights of all vulnerable people. Some even think that healthy newborn babies are disposable if their parents so desire. One may wonder how such a moral position has come to be justified. Here, it is essential to scrutinize the philosophy of the American Animal Liberation

movement. At first sight, it might appear that compassion for the higher mammals is benevolent enough. But looked at more closely, it sometimes has sinister overtones. It is no coincidence that one of the founders of the Animal Liberation movement is also a prominent representative of the new wave of bioethicists: Peter Singer.

Singer blurs the distinction between humans and animals by contending that being human, in itself, is irrelevant to moral status. What counts is whether 'being' is a 'person'. Two characteristics determine 'personhood', he argues, rationality and Self-consciousness. It therefore follows that some animals are persons, like whales and dolphins, while some people, for instance, those suffering from Alzheimer's or severe cognitive disabilities as well as newborn babies, are not. He reinforces his argument by claiming that those who prioritise the rights of all humans over all animals are indulging in what he calls 'speciesism', which he equates with racism.

Smith is very concerned that the practice of transplantation may degenerate into euthanasia for the purpose of harvesting organs. He still believes that there is such a thing as an ethical and accurate diagnosis of Brain Death, but acknowledges that the supposedly brain dead are often kept going for an awful long time before their heart is removed. Moreover, a protocol devised in Pittsburgh allows for 'Heart Death Donors' in cases where the seriously disabled request that their own organs should be transplanted. Disabled Rights Activists have been affronted by this move because, they say, in a society that believes that a severely disabled life is not worth living, it will soon lead to a situation in which they will be pressurized into donating livers, kidneys and even hearts to healthy citizens whose own organs have failed them.

### Scientific Elitism

The moral values of these new medical ethicists is uncannily reminiscent of those of German doctors in the early part of the twentieth century before Nazism reared its ugly head. There are, of course, limits to which historical parallels can be drawn. Lightning never strikes twice in the same place. The political, economic and social map is quite different now. However, there is the same parsimony at feeding useless mouths, and the same propensity to regard some lives as expendable and others not. There is also the same smug certainty that what they were advocating was of great benefit to society, and even the same hint of scientific elitism in their attitude

It is true that Fascism, the ideology that came to embody the spirit of utilitarianism, is anathema to liberalism, the orthodoxy of modern democracy. But the difference between the two may be more superficial than many people realize. Is it possible that under the apparently benign auspices of liberalism, the establishment of a quasi-Fascist state could be imminent? Reading Wesley Smith's book inclines one to believe it might. At least, the new bioethical movement has not reached Britain to the same extent as it has

taken hold in the United States. Let us hope it never will. We must take heed of Mr Smith's salutary warning before it is too late.

'Culture of Death' concludes with the hope that another movement will supplant the current fashion, based on the assertion of human rights and the Hippocratic tradition. It seems to me that what is really at stake in this, as in other pro-life issues, is whether we continue to retain our Christian religion and values, or whether we embrace the pagan, hedonistic culture towards which Western society seems to be relentlessly marching. It is not surprising, in this respect, that all the modern bioethicists express a keen desire to abolish religion, or at best, marginalize it as an option. They recognize that while Christianity lingers, it constitutes a force for resistance to everything that they envisage. The brutality and callousness of the utilitarian outlook makes one realize that the secular, materialist lifestyle we have all become accustomed to, is not only empty and unfulfilling, but ultimately extremely dangerous.