

"this you pay a price
with the loss

Philosophy



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" This is a very special day for me. It's the day of my release, the release from suffering, the release from the torment of my body." Those were the words of the very first Canadian to die through the process of doctor assisted-suicide, with the doctor being Jack Kevorkian. His name was Austin Bastable, and in the last few years of his life he became a crusader for the right to die with dignity.

It has been only in these last few years, with the introduction of people such as Dr. Jack Kevorkian and Austin Bastable, that the world has begun to see the benefits made possible by the act of assisted-suicide. The prevention of suffering and pain made possible through this medicine, regarded as immoral for years, affects not only the patient but their immediate and distant relatives as well. Kevorkian told a judicial court the same one day in late April, early May: " Suicide is not the aim. Eliminating suffering is the aim, but you pay a price with the loss of a life." Although Kevorkian's methods have succeeded with some difficulty, in the USA, their northern neighbour, our great dominion of Canada, disallows the administration of this relieving practice. In

our grand country assisted suicide is illegal.

Cases of other terminally ill persons have surfaced throughout the news, the most prominent being those related to Dr. "Death" Kevorkian. We don't often

think on what a terminally ill person might be like. They might be suffering from Lou Gehrig's Disease. They might be suffering from multiple sclerosis.

They

might be suffering from any number of other types of injuries and diseases.

What

we don't think about are the cases that bring out our most empathetic feelings.

Take the case of one Christine Busalacchi, who was so severely injured in an accident that she now lives in what her father calls a "persistent vegetative condition." Vegetative is precisely the word to describe her condition. She has lost enough weight to cause her to appear as someone else.

She has her right leg bent with her knee always in the air and her left foot is frozen in a quite unnatural manner. Her skin remains milk white, the kind of colour one would associate with the skin of dead bodies. She chews constantly,

often gagging on her own saliva. She has a gastrostomy tube protruding

from her

stomach. Nurses have to come every so often to change her diaper. She will never

respond to any stimulus voluntarily, only through reflex action, and that reaction will be only in her brain. A well-known neurologist pointed out how her

brain now only includes those parts of it that control the reflexive actions, such as chewing, rather than those parts that make us human. Christine is not

the only person in that situation. Many others are forced to live the rest of their artificial lives in a prison where freedom is taken captive the freedom to die.

Canada's laws against assisted-suicide have been attacked before. The most well known "right-to-die" campaigners in Canada are the late Sue Rodriguez

and the late Austin Bastable. Sue Rodriguez led the "right-to-die" campaign against the government in 1993, where a ban against assisted-suicide was narrowly upheld. Sue later died in an assisted suicide in 1994. Bastable become

known to many Canadians in early May of this year. He became the first Canadian

to die with the aid of Dr. Kevorkian, as well as the first non-American to do so,

on May 6th. Bastable was said to have had a videotape recorded for the

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purpose

of being shown during a media briefing in Toronto: " My death is a blow for freedom, not just for myself but for every rational Canadian who someday may

wish to have a choice in how they will die."

Comparing cases such a Christine's, Sue's and Austin's it becomes clear that quite a few people support the concept of assisted-suicide. In fact, physician-assisted voluntary euthanasia is favoured three-to-one according to

polls taken in the USA. Of course, the USA is not Canada, but how much different

can we be. Still, although our countries have a long way to go in providing people the right to die, there are some places where our species is beginning to

see the light.

The Northern Territory of Australia's legislature became the first in the world to allow voluntary euthanasia in May of this year. Bob Dent became the

first person to kill himself under the world's only such law. Yet this act in itself had profound results; federal lawmakers drawing legislature to make doctor assisted-suicide illegal. The papal system of the Vatican voiced its opinion of the event exclaiming that no law or human suffering could justify euthanasia.

Arguments such as these have no substance at all, if one looks closely.

Dent, in a letter to his government, made numerous points that show this.

He

argued that " If I were to keep a pet animal in the same condition I am in, I would be prosecuted." He also restated the already widely known fact that religion and state must be kept separated: " What right has anyone, because of

their own religious faith (to which I don't subscribe), to demand that I behave

according to their rules until some omniscient doctor decides that I have had

enough and goes ahead and increases my morphine until I die?" The answer to that

question is undeniably, NONE, no right at all.

With time, and the understanding of the public, the right to die

campaign can be won. People would have the freedom to decide when they have had

enough suffering and how they wish to die. Yet the time it will take is most probably a long one. Many problems and obstacles must be overcome, from the

oppression of religious organisations to the negative image portrayed by biased

media. In time these organisations might see the light, and we will all be able

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to go gentle into that good night.

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