

Taking sides:

Is doctor-assisted suicide medical mercy or a deadly mistake?



MATTHEW DICKERSON
Columnist

To live or to die is the most intimate and private of decisions, bar none. For certain individuals to arrogate this decision from those desiring doctor-assisted suicide is to plumb the very depths of callousness. For human beings, to live or die is a matter of choice, a value judgment. No person is in a position to make this choice for a fellow human being.

In a society in which one in five people die in connection with cigarettes, one might expect concerns surrounding doctor-assisted suicide to be an ethical, moral and legal superfluity. But doctor-assisted suicide is not superfluous, as the recent failure of the right-to-die referendum in California demonstrates. While the state may have exited our bedroom, it yet lingers at our death bed. Anti-suicide meddlers espouse the imposition of their value judgments upon other human beings, human beings causing no harm to anyone else. Apparently, this is to ensure that terminal patients, typically dying in paroxysms of agony, will do so to the ethical satisfaction of anti-suicide advocates.

To bring this inhuman state of affairs into sharp relief, consider that most people would never allow an animal to die in this manner. Most animal owners go to great lengths to ensure that their animals die in peace, assisted by a veterinarian if need be. A better death is denied to humans because of the "ethical dilemma of doctor-assisted suicide." It is certainly no "ethical dilemma" for those willing to undergo doctor-assisted suicide. The dilemma is engineered by those wishing to co-opt the will of individuals in making decisions that affect their own lives. If there is a genuine dilemma, it is for those that must live against their own will, attached to gurgling machines and dying in slow-motion horror.

It comes as no surprise that those advocating doctor-assisted suicide are often close to those desiring it. They are typically health care givers, spouses, parents and children of the terminally ill. They have looked into the tear-streaked eyes of those facing torturous death in a drug-induced fog, interrupted only by spasms of pain for the last days of life. They have been asked for an easier way to die. That such cases are not common is no argument for the cases that do in fact occur.

That some people diagnosed as terminal survived, and might now claim "regret" if they had committed suicide, is no argument against those choosing suicide. All human choices are open to regret, with one important exception. Human beings are not sacrificial beasts dying for the satisfaction of anyone else. Let us respect other people's decisions that affect their life and death.

Life is the single most precious commodity on this earth. So valuable and sacred is it that we strive to protect, improve and prolong it at all levels.

No individual in Western civilization is more looked upon to fulfill these duties than the medical doctor. Therefore, no adequate justification exists for allowing our physicians to participate in a patient's suicide, or active euthanasia.

Active euthanasia is the intentional initiation of an action which hastens death and should not be confused with passive euthanasia, or refraining from an action which would delay inevitable death.

Relying almost totally on emotional arguments, proponents of legalized active euthanasia fail to recognize the historical and necessary emphasis on the doctor's role as healer. Doctor participation in mercy killing degrades and warps this traditional role.

From a historical perspective, the Hippocratic Oath is acknowledged by most to be the foundation of medical ethics. It holds premier status among physicians as the summary of their ethical obligations. Given its continued significance in medical science today, the injunctions of the Oath are far from dismissible. The section of the Hippocratic Oath addressing pharmacology pledges the physician not to administer any deadly drugs.

In more current times, the American Medical Association holds the position that intentional termination of life is contrary to the purpose of the medical profession.

Those who argue for active euthanasia submit that allowing patients to suffer a slow and painful death illustrates a lack of mercy. The failure of this argument lies in the medical reality that no great number of patients undergoing severe suffering exist who can find relief only in death. Modern science provides many methods of pain management for virtually all suffering, terminally ill individuals.

One must also keep in mind that physicians are fallible. Should a physician make even one mistake with one patient in judging that active euthanasia is the appropriate course of action, that mistake is fatal and irreversible. When we already demand so much of our physicians, it is entirely unrealistic to expect them to determine with zero error the quality of life and mental capacity of someone else.

Legalization of active euthanasia would set a dangerous precedent, and no amount of detailed guidelines can ensure that abuses will not occur. Practically and morally, it is a dangerous idea. Doctors should be healers, not gods.



TONI GARRARD
Columnist

Jennifer, Heather, John and Julie Coman

MAIL CALL

Fraternity members showed compassion

In an atmosphere of negative publicity towards the fraternity system, the family of Peter Coman wishes to personally and publicly acknowledge the Kappa Sigma fraternity for its tremendous support during the past two weeks. After Peter suffered a severe head injury after a car crash on Oct. 17, my parents immediately called one of Peter's fraternity brothers who went straight to the hospital in order to keep my parents informed throughout their rush here from California. Two additional brothers met them at the airport, expedited a car rental, and escorted them to Humana. Upon arriving my parents were met by 40 more Kappa Sigmas who kept up a vigil until Peter stabilized. The Kappa Sigmas in addition managed to rent my parents a hotel room on a home game weekend and eventually found them a furnished apartment.

The loyalty and love I witnessed expressed toward Peter by his brothers in the fraternity is an unparalleled image of unity in my mind. I, my sister, and my parents cannot thank the Kappa Sigmas enough for what they have done and continue to do for our family. These men will always be in our thoughts and prayers.

Multicultural foes must face reality

I am an African-American female, and I am writing in response to the letter submitted by John Groenewold; to the editorial "Going to Extremes," both of which were in Tuesday's edition of The Battalion; and to anyone else who has negative attitudes about the requirement of "multicultural" classes in the A&M curriculum. The purpose of these courses will be to educate all of the students on how to interact with each other and how to be sensitive to one another.

I understand that you do not have the desire to learn about my culture. You probably do not want to know any more about me than some of my brothers and sisters want to know about you and your ancestors, but we have been forced ("required") to learn things from your point of view for more than 12 years. I must tell you that it is not a matter of what you want anymore; it is a matter of reality. The reality is that pretty soon, you will not be the majority in America anymore. The populations of African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and other "minority" cultures are growing vastly.

We will be the majority, and what you must come to realize is that one day, one of my brothers or sisters may very well be your child's employer, whether you want to believe it or not. As frightening as it may be to you, everywhere you go, if it doesn't already happen now, you will have to interact

with someone of another culture, and we all have to learn how to be sensitive to one another. I'm sorry if this disappoints you, but this, my friend, is reality.

Leslie Montgomery
Class of '94

Time for truth about minority history

I would like to address this response to John Groenewold's letter in the Nov. 3 issue of The Battalion and to other Aggies who share his viewpoint. Maybe multicultural education won't change your views about blacks and the negative encounters you have had. However, the main goal of a multicultural class would be to promote accommodation and understanding of races in America, not to shove foreign culture down your throat. The class is to be conducted so that you can air your views as well as listen to the views of others. This way we can promote understanding of and respect for all races so that we can all live together.

I'm willing to bet your experiences with blacks are few and far between. I am black, and I resent the fact that you could not know me, yet you feel negatively toward me. I also resent that I have to prove myself worthy of your respect first, though you don't judge others on the same criteria.

Our educational system has done a great job of teaching us Eurocentric history, much of it glorified and untrue. I feel that if I have to learn about how Christopher Columbus discovered a nation where civilization already existed, why can't you learn about the struggles and achievements of minorities in our society? It's time to learn the truth about all Americans of all races. If you are against multicultural education, I guess you're telling me my people don't deserve their place in history and in America.

You'll be leaving A&M soon. You'll be prepared for the technology of the 21st century, but how will you be able to live in a 21st century that will no longer be dominated by whites?

Bobby Trammel
Class of '95

So much for Aggie code of honor

I am writing to comment on the recent theft of my HP485X calculator from the Engineering 109 lab in the Civil Engineering/TTI Building. After spending a long evening in the computer lab, I went home, leaving my calculator behind. As luck would have it, a true Aggie found the calculator and turned it in to the lost and found at the area help desk.

Later, I called on the off chance that it might have been turned in. I was elated to hear that it was, and that I could pick it up in the lab. The student worker at the help desk assured me that he would put it in a safe place. Thank you both for being so honest and kind.

The next day I went to the lab to retrieve the calculator only to find that it had been stolen. This is bad bull! The person who did this is not observing the Aggie Code of Honor, probably does not know what it is, and needs to withdraw from A&M and enroll at t.u. You are a common thief, a parasite on

the backside of all good Aggies, and should be discharged like fecal matter into the sewer. Didn't your mother teach you any better?

In the hopes that the calculator can be found, I am including its serial number: 3140 SO 1290, model HP485X. If you know someone who has recently obtained a calculator of this sort, please inspect it. This person is not one of us.

Rochelle Beall
Class of '94

Just what is it about the school in Austin?

Somebody explain to me: What is wrong with going to school in Austin?

Stefano Alberti
Graduate student

Racism harsh word to use without proof

The word "racism" has become such a common buzzword today. In response to the Mr. Arias' letter accusing the College Station police officers of being racist in the arrest of four Hispanic individuals, I have this point to make.

Arias, what justification do you have to label someone a racist without knowing the whole story and all the facts, especially at a time when being called a racist has such far-reaching consequences? You claim the Hispanic individuals were unduly arrested, but you don't know what the white man and the Hispanic man were at odds about. You also don't know the charge brought against the Hispanic man and his companions. These types of observations should bring certain questions to mind, but no accusations should be made beforehand.

I'm not saying racism doesn't exist or that it's not a problem, but it really bothers me when people automatically shout racism and discrimination when a justifiable outcome doesn't fall for a particular group. These instances tend to dilute the cases where racism and discrimination really do exist.

While I agree that the Hispanic individuals may have been unjustly arrested, I want to point out that one should not be so quick to jump to conclusions and blindly blame everything on racism when you don't know all the facts.

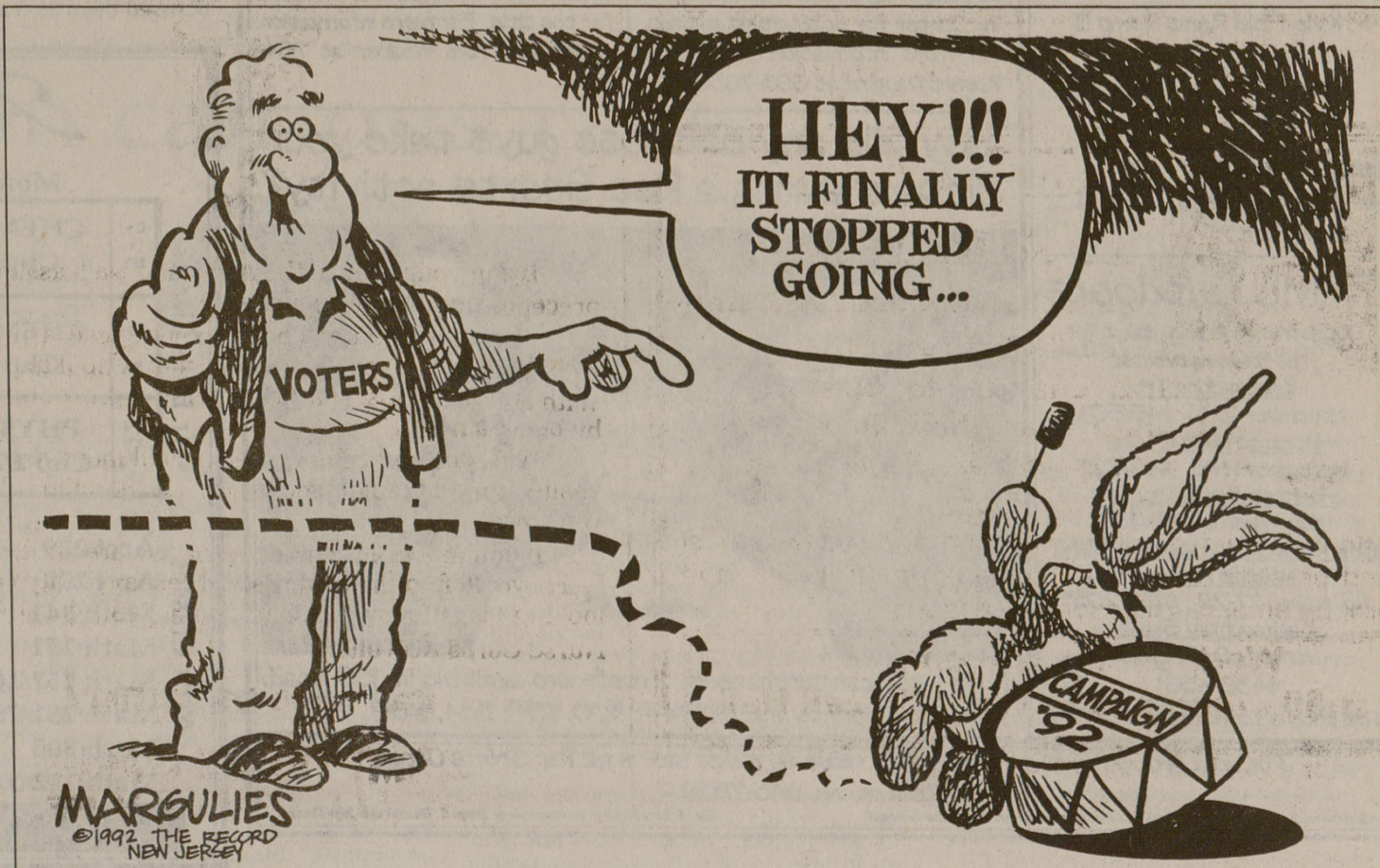
Coy Kouba
Class of '92

Letter condemned its own authors

To quote Zeke Pez and Owen Watson's letter in Wednesday's Mail Call: "If you find any of these behaviors (bestiality, necrophilia and pedophilia) unacceptable yet accept homosexuality and/or heterosexuality, then you are a bigoted, sexist pig."

I assume that Pez and Watson find sexual love for cows, corpses and children unacceptable yet you accept heterosexuality. You are, by your own "logical" argument, bigoted, (hetero-) sexist pigs. I can only agree.

Nancy Tubbs
Class of '93



MARGULIES
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NEW JERSEY

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