

Helping to Die

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The title of a recent news article shocked me. It said, “Dutch Docs Helping Sick Kids Die.” We are well aware of the debate over legalizing euthanasia for adults, but the topic of this article was alarming: Dutch doctors helping children die. I looked at the study more closely and saw that it covered 64 deaths of ill children within a four-month period. Of those, 42 involved medical decisions to hasten death. Just as with many other matters, the issue of euthanasia seems to have turned into “One small step for man and a giant leap for mankind.”

Holland is so far away from us, we can read the article, pretend there is no world community and that this news article doesn’t affect us. The question of euthanasia is not so far away from us though. It is coming up in the USA this fall – in Oregon – so perhaps we should look at this story with greater interest.

Euthanasia began as means for doctors to help terminally ill, elderly, consenting adults escape the pain and misery of a long, drawn out death. There has been raging controversy over the matter, and the Dutch were the first to legalize euthanasia in 2002. I just wonder how assisting consenting

adults to terminate their lives turned into this monster of doctors ending children's lives?

I was anxious to verify the 'age of consent' in the Netherlands. Maybe children are treated like adults in Holland justifying such actions. Through research I discovered that the legal age to drive in Holland is 18. Children can't legally sit in the front seat of a moving vehicle if they are below the age of 12. The legal drinking age in Holland is 16; the legal voting age is 18.

If the Dutch government considers children mature enough to make life altering decisions from birth this move would be slightly easier to understand, but the Dutch government feels they must monitor each challenge in a child's life and legalize it as the child matures. How then do they explain that children are not mature enough to experience many things adults can, yet they are subjected to an immoral and heinous act that was legalized for adults?

Perhaps the Dutch authorities feel that the question of euthanasia is not a child's decision, but falls under the guidelines of 'parental consent'. However, if something as serious as a child's life is considered a parental decision why aren't Dutch parents allowed to decide the proper age their children can drink or drive or vote? It seems ironic that parents can't decide these issues for their children, but they have the power to terminate their child's life.

Historically, justifying the death of any group of people, has lead to the justification of death for another group.

In Holland, euthanasia seems to be taking the historic route. I found no direct connection between Holland's euthanasia of consenting adults and a parent's choice to end their child's life. Allowing the former seems to have lead to accepting the latter. These things seem to 'just happen' and if no one questions them, they become the accepted norm.

Euthanasia is wrong and legalizing it would be a grave mistake. I trust the USA Supreme Court will understand the ramifications of passing such a law and think long and hard before doing so. Additionally, the dangerous path this law can lead us down in the future is starkly apparent in Holland. The doctor-assisted childhood deaths there should be warning enough.