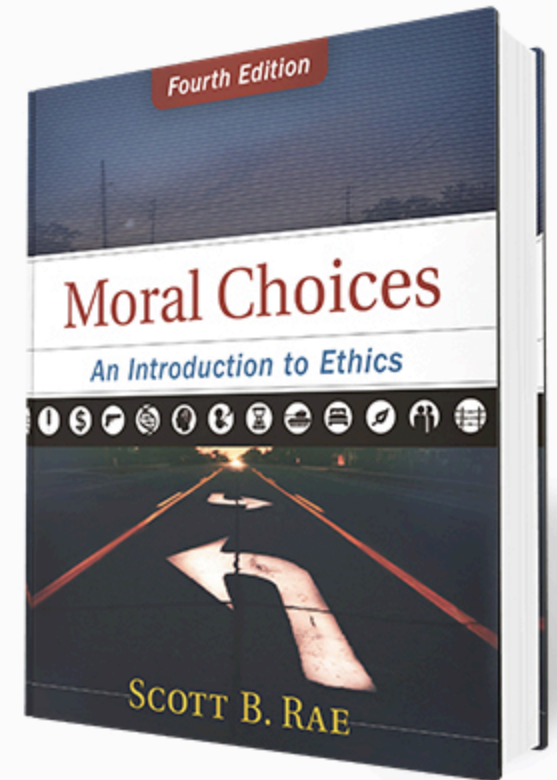


Chapter 8: Ethical Issues at the End of Life



Introduction: Definitions and Terms

- It is important to know and understand the relevant definitions and terms surrounding this issue.
- Without such knowledge, it is easy to get confused and be rendered ineffective in offering advice to those seeking it.
- In order to make a biblically informed case, one must be able to know and understand the details of various end-of-life issues.

- Termination of Life Support
- Physician-Assisted Suicide
- Euthanasia
- Ordinary and Extraordinary Means
- Living Will
- Competence

Legal Background

- Karen Ann Quinlan (1975-76)
 - Result: families can remove a respirator based on right to privacy if the patient had indicated previously that they would not want to be on life support.
- Nancy Cruzan (1990)
 - Result: feeding tubes can be removed if the patient has previously indicated they did not want to be kept alive by them.
- Washington v. Glucksberg (1997)
 - There is a difference between assisting suicide and withdrawing life support.
 - There is no constitutional right to die.

End of Life in Biblical Perspective

- Humans are made in God's image.
- God's gift of life is sacred and not to be taken.
- The timing and manner of death belongs to God.
- Death was not a part of God's original plan.
- Death is now a normal part of our life "under the sun."
- Death is an enemy and a normal part of life.

- Because of Jesus, death is a conquered enemy.
- It need not always be resisted.
- Death is the doorway to eternity.
- Suicide is outside of the biblical moral parameters.
- PAS and euthanasia are also outside the moral parameters in Scripture.

Termination of Life Support

- In the discussion about ethics and the termination of life support, a distinction is often made between withdrawing and withholding treatments.
- Ethically, if it is acceptable to withdraw treatment, then it is also acceptable to withhold that same treatment.

- When a treatment is removed for acceptable reasons, the physician does not intentionally cause the patient's death.
- Removal of life support does not constitute euthanasia or assisted suicide.
- Terminating life support is not “playing God” for the simple reason that in legitimate circumstances, terminating life support does not cause death, it merely allows the disease to take its natural course.

- For a Christian, death is the doorway to Heaven, which is the believer's ultimate goal, not this earthly life.
 - Therefore, under proper conditions, it is acceptable for patients and families to remove life support and allow death to run its natural course.
 - If a competent adult requests the removal of life support, if the treatment is futile, or if the burden of the treatment outweighs the benefit, removal is permissible.

PAS and Euthanasia

- Physician–assisted suicide and active euthanasia involve a doctor actively playing a role in ending the life of a patient by either providing a lethal dosage of medicine or actually administering a lethal injection of drugs.
- From the context of a Christian worldview, only God has the right to take a life and euthanasia is tantamount to murder.

There are five primary arguments offered by proponents of physician-assisted suicide/euthanasia:

1. Argument from mercy
2. Argument from autonomy which extends to the right of privacy and right to die
3. There is no moral difference between killing and allowing to die
4. Euthanasia does not always involve killing a person
5. PAS might have societal benefits.

Autonomy

- The difficult ethical issue is how to make PAS/euthanasia available to those who desire it (if one agrees that the individual has such autonomy) while also preventing the abuse of nonvoluntary euthanasia.
- Each argument offered in favor of PAS/euthanasia might permit dangerous applications when extended:
 - the right to mercy might lead to involuntary euthanasia
 - the right to die might lead to the duty to die
 - possible societal resources might create a eugenics agenda.