

THE EUTHANASIA DEBATE

From a secular materialist viewpoint a human being is only a physical process, or a biological robot, and life is only about experiencing pleasures through the sense-doors. In this case euthanasia becomes the natural and logical conclusion for a very sick person. A lot of people who advocate legalizing euthanasia are operating out of this modern perspective without knowing it, never mind questioning it.

I would like to suggest – speaking not only from the perspective of a renunciant monk, but also as someone who has worked in hospitals with seriously ill people for more than 10 years – that there are two very important spiritual possibilities, that if accepted and added to the debate on euthanasia, would change the whole thing. The first is that the elderly and infirm are a blessing to a spiritual mankind, not a burden. Although individuals or families may find it hard to cope, society as a whole does have the resources to care for the elderly and could benefit enormously from this. We just need to develop a deeper understanding of what we have to learn from the elderly and from old age and sickness in order to see how all of us can benefit, whether it is by caring for a relative or working voluntarily in some capacity or another.

The wisdom of experience that the elderly can share with us is an invaluable resource, it can help us keep our lives in perspective and see what really matters in the long-run. The compassion that we can find for others and ourselves through caring, if we are not overburdened by it, is priceless. In fact the capacities of the elderly or sick to slow down the greedy, soften the angry and dispel the illusions of life are all unsurpassed. The urgency that we can gain from contact with the elderly in our own spiritual practice is invaluable.

This brings us on to the second spiritual possibility that may be more difficult for some people to understand or accept – that while a person's spiritual faculties of mindfulness and wisdom are intact they have the chance to escape death through the liberation of the heart. A person's own impending death may be their strongest motivation to find their escape. Therefore the last conscious days can spiritually be the uttermost precious and important time for a person. Sometimes when the body is weak, the spirit gets stronger and stronger.

These two considerations seem to me to change the reasons why most people would think to end their lives – they see no chance of their survival and they do not wish to be a burden on others. Also, the Hospice movement has surely taught us that with sufficient care, there are few scenarios where a person's pain and suffering cannot be managed to be bearable and the potential of their conscious dying realized as far as possible.



I offer this for your reflection.

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