

Christianity - Ethics: Bioethics (Critical Thinking)

Definition of ethics:

- Teachings that reflect a code of conduct which guides people into what is acceptable behaviour
- Therefore, they can be described as rules, codes or directions whereby a person knows, reads and understands and then acts on them.

Three philosophical principles of Christian Ethics:

1. **Aristotelian**: based on the ancient philosopher Aristotle:
 - Humans beings seek happiness and their actions are in response to this search. The ethical life is based on justice, courage, prudence and moderation.

2. **Enlightenment**

- Notion of the existence of God is challenged
- The moral order, by implication, ethics are not a question of God, since the God cannot be proven
- Philosophers such as Emmanuel Kant argues that ethics were a means of maintaining social order and there was no predetermined "natural order", i.e. No natural law as prescribed by Thomas Aquinas
- This period gives rise to rationalism and scientific thinking

3. **Natural law, utilitarianism and Consequentialism**

Natural law: Based on theology that there is natural order, that ethical response is due to a person seeking to do what is right and just as determined by inner principles of humans' search to know and love God.

Utilitarianism: Doing the greater good for the benefit of the majority/major number

Consequentialism: Actions derive their moral worth from their outcomes

Source of Christian ethics - where do they come from?

- Sacred text: Bible
- Old testament (Decalogue - Ten commandments - exodus 20:1-17, Deuteronomy 5:6-21)
- New testament (Beatitudes - Matthew 5:7; Golden rule Matthew 22:37)
- Writings of patristic fathers (early church leaders)

For catholics:

- writings of Thomas Aquinas (emphasis on natural law)
- Catholic papal teachings/encyclicals
- Catholic bishops conference statements
- Catholic catechism (compendium of catholic teachings)

For reformed and Protestant churches:

- Churches: lutheranism, anglicanism, presbyterianism, etc.

Prominent protestant approaches include:

- Situation ethics (Joseph Fletcher)
- Duty ethics (Paul Ramsey)
- Responsibility ethics (Richard Niebuhr)

Because these denominations are evangelical from their foundation, they place importance on sacred texts.

ABORTION:

Definition: The wilful destruction of an embryo (Foetus)

- Miscarriages or natural loss of an embryo by a mother is NOT an abortion
- Not every loss of a foetus is an abortion
- Loss of the foetus due to a natural loss is okay with Catholics
- **General:** All Christian denominations do not condone abortion because the principle is life is sacred and therefore you don't destroy it.
- Some reasons as to why abortions are performed:
 - Teenage pregnancy
 - Financial implications
 - Foetal malformation
 - Gender selection

Biblical injunctions against abortion*Old testament:*

- Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17 "you shall not kill"
- Job 31:15: "did not he who made me in the womb make him? Did not the same one fashion us before our birth?"
- Jeremiah 1: 4-5 "the word of the lord..."
- Isaiah 44:2 "... Made you and formed you from the womb"

New testament:

- Luke 1:42 "Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb"

Tradition reasons against abortion:

- The *didache* (teachings of the 12 apostles) c 80 CW: "you shall not procure abortion. You shall not destroy the new born child"
- 4th century two church synods issued unqualified condemnation of abortion
- 1588 Pope Sixtus V imposed a penalty of excommunication for abortion
- 1983 canon law revised but still stated: "the church penalty for abortion at any stage of pregnancy, was remains excommunication"

Based on the principle of the "sanctity of human life", no abortions are permitted unless it occurs under the principle of "double effect" and it is not "intended". **Why?**

- The human person is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception
- Pope John Paul in 1982 stated: "I condemn... experimental manipulation of human embryo since the human being, from the moment of conception to death..."

- The catholic church believes that from the moment of conception, there is a human person or at the very least, there is “potential for human person.” the catholic church’s position is that even though the fertilised cells do not possess the status of person, because person entails more than “cells”, they nevertheless have genetic make up to create a human person
- The Catholic teaching does not forbid the unavoidable death of a foetus if it is occasioned by the outcome of an action performed for another purpose, e.g. The removal of a cancerous uterus or a fallopian tube containing an ectopic pregnancy
- Therefore, an abortion incident to an otherwise lawful medical care that is required to save the life of the mother, e.g. Chemotherapy, are given an interpretive exemption from the rule under the principle of the double effect.

From a catholic perspective:

NO intentional abortion is licit for whatever reason (save the injunction of “double effect”)

- Anglicans or lutherans believe if the foetus is the result of rape or incest then it is okay to abort because we’re being compassionate to the mother
- Some medical and sexual assault (Lutheran) and left to the woman for her decision (uniting church)
- Catholics cannot use such reasons, all be they compelling, to procure an abortion

Principle of double effect:

- Basically this principle means that ONE action has a twofold effect

Denominational perspective on abortion:

Lutheran church: “Special cases, e.g. Incest, rape

Uniting church: Society so often fails women and their children, the synods have spoken on abortion and recognise the final decision is left to the pregnant woman and the church should support them

Salvation army: In cases of proven rape and foetus abnormality, an abortion may be justified because of the extent to which rape and incest violate the whole personal.

EUTHANASIA

Definition: The assisting of a medical practitioner (or other person) to commit suicide

- The practice is an emotive one and sometimes the phrase “dying with dignity” is used in conjunction with the word to make it more acceptable and appealing
- The practice is tantamount to murder the actor in such an incident, even though it is required by another person
- Very few countries permit “legalised Euthanasia”
- In Australia, Euthanasia is illegal. People who practice euthanasia have been charged with murder.

Some Christian principles involved in Euthanasia:

- 1. Dignity of human life** - Every human being is to be treated with respect + life, once created must be nurtured until its natural end
- 2. The right to life** - Everyone has a right to life and not to be arbitrarily dismissed
- 3. Life is sacred** - From its inception to death (natural)
- 4. The value of Suffering** - This is a Christian value
- 5. Social dimension of life** - Community responsibility

Like many other issues, various denominations have different principles:

For Catholics, the additional sources of ethical teaching on euthanasia come from various popes - Evangelium Vitae JP II, 1996 and the "Catholic catechism":

1. The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation... among such a fundamental rights one should mention in this regard every human beings right to life and physical integrity from the moment of conception to death

Christian biblical references:

- No specific biblical injunctions dealing with the modern complex understanding of Euthanasia, except for Judges 9:52-55 and 2 Samuel 1:9-10
- That said, using reason and understanding to interpret the Christian value of life, the following can be used as biblical teachings on the issue:
 - You shall not kill (Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17)
 - Human beings are made in the likeness and image of God (Genesis 1:26-28)
 - Psalms 8:5
 - Corinthians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 6:19
 - John 10:10
 - Matt 22:39

2. Any act or omission, which of itself or by **intention**, causes death to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder contrary to the dignity of the human person and the respect to God, his creator

3. Human life is the basis of all goods, and is the necessary source and condition of every human activity and all of society

Intention is the key to understanding its morality or otherwise. Like abortion, deliberative and intentional ending of life is sinful.

- However, the ending of life prematurely, which is not intentioned or is a result of another action is not sinful (double effect). This could be interpreted as involuntary euthanasia.
- Even though death may be desired, the actual death is a result of a good intention or action. For example, the death of an aged person whose life ends due to medication for a good intent.
- The voluntary one dates from the war. People were getting blown up and they were dying. Heroin was provided to eliminate pain.
- Voluntary is NEVER permissible under ANY circumstance because it is MURDER
- Involuntary is okay because there is no intention of killing - you want to manage their transition from this life to the next
- There is the issue of a distinction between **ordinary and extraordinary** means of prolonging life.
- In other words, does Catholicism teach that life must be preserved at all costs? No. One does not have to go excessive means of extending one's life, neither does one have to go to extraordinary means to continue living... including financial reasons.
- The notion of **unintended consequences**
- If you're confronted with two evils, you must always choose the lesser of the two.
 - In the case of a terminally ill patient, a medical practitioner may administer life shortening drugs and the patient consume them if the intention is to do good, i.e. Pain management
 - e.g. **Pius XII**
 - The intended outcome: management pain for the patient

- The unintended: shortened life.
- The Catholic option in dealing with “Terminal” or “end of life” issues is a **palliative care**
- This method of dealing with the dignity of life, the right to life and other associated principles are fulfilled
- Sensitive care is taken for the patient throughout the various stages of dying with medical and medication, family and community help, spiritual assistance and so on
- The intention and the action here is to assist the dying person transit from this life to the next, ethically and with dignity... thus fulfilling the christian edict of the sanctity of life to the end.

The Anglican Church beliefs:

- Follows the same route as the roman catholic church on the matter of euthanasia - it is morally unacceptable. The church believes that euthanasia would put vulnerable people at risk and devalue the role of a palliative care. This word is associated with alleviating pain.
- The society would develop an unhealthy attitude to dying
- Erode the bond of trust between doctor and patient