

"Natural law," what crimes are committed in thy name!

What oppressions! What imprisonments of mind & body!

What unnatural offenses against sound living & sensible-sensitive social arrangements!

INSTANCE: Lawyer R.R., a regular CAPE COD TIMES columnist, bludgeons his opponents with natural-law argumentation, by which he claims that compassion & religion are on his side. My counterargument (CCT 23Sept93) seeks to deprive him of logic, compassion, God--& natural law.

1 Opposition to **euthanasia** is the burden of R.R.'s Sept.17 column. The survey (my #1) offered the options of painless suicide or dying passively with intractable pain. Lawyer R.R. loads natural law into the second option by calling it "natural death" (vs. suicide as unnatural, a late Medieval term of negative connotations such as abnormal, (RHD<sup>2</sup>) "lacking human qualities or sympathies; monstrous; inhuman...not genuine...artificial or contrived...lacking a valid or natural claim...illegitimate"). My first task (§1), then, was to deprive him of "natural" in his representation of the survey. My substitute expression (as above) is "dying passively." This substitution has the additional virtue of appealing to the human desire to maintain control: losing it, being reduced to passivity, is a constant in the fear of dying.

While I'm at it, I add the sanction of dignity, which favors activity over passivity.

2 In §2 I undermine both R.R.'s logic & his compassion-claim by use of the sanctions of literature & religion, the familiar Serenity Prayer (Rein. Niebuhr, 1935) now carrying conviction & authority in the public mind. And I load on the now rising concern in American public life that we Americans "be responsible for our own lives."

3 In §3 I call God's law down on R.R.--showing that dying passively, "letting nature take its course" & have dominion over the dying person, violates the divine commandment that we are to have dominion over nature (Gn.1.26-28;1.15). If it be objected that that dominion does not include death, my answer would be that God has made us eaters, & what we eat first dies or dies while we're eating it.

4 §4 seeks to deprive R.R. of the divine sanction & of his lock between "natural law" & human dignity. Aristotle (contra Plato) interlocked idea & form, then Aquinas interlocked natural-law-form & God's will (in the tradition of the pre-Christian Roman-law mentality which continues as a fundament of Roman Catholic natural-law theology). (I pray for Christian unity, & it pairs me to have to go against Rome or any other church.)

5 §5 expands from **euthanasia** to **conception control** (contraception), **birth control** (abortion), & **population control** (ecology): "embarrassed..angered..appalled."

## We should not live — or die — passively

Russell Redgate, in his Sept. 17 column, says that "nearly three of four Cape Codders surveyed said they would prefer a quick and painless suicide to a natural death." I'm with the majority, and he's against us. I need to say some things on our behalf.

1. Everybody dies a "natural" death, human beings being a mortal part of nature. Dr. Kevorkian uses nature to help the terminally ill die naturally but not passively. As human beings should not live passively, who says we must die passively? Is there greater inherent dignity in passivity than in activity?

2. The Serenity Prayer says "Lord, give me the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, the courage to change what should be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference." What cannot be changed is the fact that, sooner or later, we're all terminal cases. What should be changed is the dogma that though we should be responsible for our own lives, we should not take charge of our own deaths. That dogma violates logic and humanity.

3. I appeal to the law of God against Mr. Redgate's natural law. God's law includes that we human beings should have dominion over nature, of which our

bodies are a part. A law that says that in our dying, nature is to have dominion over us — i.e., that we should die "naturally" — is against the law of God.

4. Since he preaches natural law, I would not expect Mr. Redgate to mention God, so I'm not surprised that he does not. Two thousand years ago the Jews spoke of God and the pagan Greeks spoke of nature. Mr. Redgate goes along with the pagans and claims to speak for "the dignity of the human person." Did not those Jews and early Christians speak for the dignity of the human person?

5. Unfortunately, some churches teach passivity and call it natural law. Be passive: You may or may not conceive. Be passive: If you've conceived, give birth. Be passive: If you're in terminal agony, hang in there till it kills you.

I'm a Christian, and I'm embarrassed and angered that some of my fellow Christians preach the inhumanity of passivity. And I am appalled at the obtuseness of those who would permit only abstinence in a world being progressively degraded by thrice the human tonnage of the world into which I was born.

WILLIS ELLIOTT  
Craigville