

Editorial

Assisted suicide = Nazi medicine

At prime time on July 23, the German television's first channel (ARD) broadcast a frontal attack on the German Society for Humane Death (DGHS)—the counterpart to the U.S. Hemlock Society—exposing it as a criminal association which was selling potassium cyanide to virtually everybody who asked for it and getting 3,000-10,000 marks per dose (production costs only about 30 pfennigs). It was also exposed that they were selling deadly drugs to mentally ill people.

Shocking new evidence was presented that could significantly toughen the charges pending against Dr. Henning Atrott, the former president of DGHS, currently in prison awaiting trial for tax evasion and selling toxic chemicals. The evidence pivoted around the fact that in Germany, it is not illegal to help a mentally competent person kill himself—but it *is* illegal to assist the suicide of persons with psychiatric disease.

Meanwhile, in Michigan, "Dr." Jack Kevorkian has assisted another man to his death—and won't be prosecuted, in all likelihood, because a Wayne County circuit judge struck down the state's new law banning assisted suicide last May. Kevorkian is only the most notorious of a growing minority of doctors who see certain lives as empty and therefore consider it the patient's "right" to end human life.

There exists no small literature on the fact that "95% of those who kill themselves have been shown to have a diagnosable psychiatric illness in the months preceding suicide," Drs. Herbert Hendin and Gerald Klerman wrote in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* (January 1991). Yet physicians who throw in their lot with the Hemlock Society or other pro-murder groups legitimize the myth which Hendin and Klerman refute—namely, that the terminally ill patient's wish to die is "totally different from the suicidal intent of those without terminal illness."

In fact, "the overwhelming majority of the terminally ill fight for life to the end." Despite the fact that the terminally ill constitute less than 3% of the total number of suicides, the focus on killing the very sick has a ghoulish prominence in the media. The Washington State Hemlock Society, which promoted (and lost)

the 1991 ballot initiative to legalize physician-assisted "suicide" there, has formed a new group called "Compassion in Dying." The new service gives you information on lethal drug dosages, will videotape your suicide request, will "be with you in the end."

Any doctor supporting such perversion is responsible for promoting suicidal/irrational fears of illness. Hendin and Klerman found:

"More individuals, particularly elderly individuals, *killed themselves because they feared or mistakenly believed they had cancer* than [the number of those who] killed themselves and had cancer." In November, Hemlock member Howard Stamper of Virginia asphyxiated his wife Lillian, killing her, because she *believed* that she had cancer. An autopsy showed no terminal illness.

It's a short step from pushing suicide to murdering patients who are "better off dead."

In Nazi Germany in 1937, one medical economist itemized the daily costs of care of a mentally ill or "deficient" person, or a "cripple," complaining that the state spent far more on the existence of these "worthless" people than it did on a healthy man with a healthy family. The wholesale slaughter performed by Nazi Germany under the rubric of euthanasia is familiar to us all—as is the holocaust of millions to which that euthanasia mentality ultimately led.

As a result of the spread of this mentality in "respectable" circles, reports have reached us that news of violence against handicapped people in Germany is accumulating. Many no longer risk going out alone after having been threatened, and even brutally attacked, by skinheads and others. Verbal threats like: "In Hitler's day, people like you would no longer be alive," or "You're eating up all the resources, while you're useless to society" have been documented.

The same Nazi notion—that a nation can repudiate whole groups of its sick citizens whenever it is economically expedient to do so—is being promoted ferociously in the United States. To stop it, will require a mass political movement based on the defense of each human life as "imago Dei," the image of God.