

HEALTH & SCIENCE

Incrementalism and Euphemisms



Judie Brown, President and Cofounder of American Life League, reflected on Incrementalism in her Commentary column on March 6, 2020. The dictionary defines incrementalism as “a policy or advocacy of a policy of political or social change by degrees: gradualism.” Brown noted, “on the downside, we know that, when it comes to abortion, political incrementalism has become a game of choosing which babies will live and which will die. It is all about what the politicians will support. Ever since the Hyde Amendment was weakened with exceptions for rape and incest, the exclusion of some babies has become the political norm. Rape, incest, life of the mother, and often fetal abnormality are the political salve elected officials require so that their votes qualify as pro-life. Yet even worse than this callous disregard for the lives of babies deemed expendable is the fact that the lasting effect of political incrementalism seeps into every aspect of our struggle to defend life.”

Examples of this gradual change in outlook are the ways some medical professionals, ethicists, and a significant number of the general population now view young children with severe disabilities who are struggling for life. There are those who feel the children would be “better off dead.” Medical personnel “claim that [the child’s] struggle for life creates emotional pain for them.” Another example given is the “challenge of treating extremely ill patients who are confronting death. Shockingly, one death with dignity expert in Oregon said: “Death with dignity and palliative care are not two separate things. They actually work together.” Brown responded, “Please note that ‘death with dignity’ is a nice turn of phrase that actually means imposed death on the vulnerable. So what this professional is saying is that incrementalism has also crept into healthcare for the aged and suffering. While you and I might think of palliative care as pain relief, these death mongers use it as a relief from life.”

Brown noted that “assisted suicide and other forms of euthanasia are spreading incrementally across our nation.” She referred to a recent headline in the NY Daily News which stated, “Death with Dignity legislation gets new life in New York.” She commented, “The irony in that headline should not surprise you, because incremental acceptance of killing is growing in popularity from man’s biological beginning until his death.” At first, assisted suicide laws were limited to those who were diagnosed with a terminal disease and less than six months to live. Gradually the net has grown worldwide to include the mentally ill, those suffering from depression, young children suffering from debilitating conditions, and even patients with treatable diseases.

Brown highlighted an opinion piece by Dr. John Goodill (Delawareonline.com, 1/20/20) who wrote,

“Control over the manner and timing of a person’s death has not been and should not be a goal of medicine.” But according to Brown, “there are far too many involved in the practice of medicine who disagree, thus threatening the lives of preborn babies, embryos in the research lab, newborns, and aging individuals. Imposing death seems to be incrementally coming into vogue as the new normal.”

A reference to Hilaire Belloc’s poem “Jim” is made. In the poem, a boy named Jim “never listened to reason, never paid attention to the rules, and constantly ran away from those in charge of his care.” A lion pounces on the boy and begins to attack him, starting at his toes and moving to his heels, ankles, shins, calves, knees. Brown noted, “As a society, we have encountered that voracious lion as well. It is known as the culture of death, and slowly but surely those who advocate for its teachings are hungrily eating away at the moral fiber of our nation – person by person, attitude by attitude, exception by exception. The question is, can we stop it? The answer is, of course we can... Step by step, we teach that fundamental truth: Choose life and do it without exception!”

Hendrik van der Breggen wrote an article on the pros and cons of euthanasia on his blog (2/18/20). [Note: The cons outweigh the pros.] His first point was that ‘medical assistance in dying’ is a euphemism and is “misleading at the get-go. When certain words are considered too blunt, harsh, painful, or offensive, people sometimes substitute a euphemism, that is, a more acceptable term, a term with fewer negative connotations or with more positive connotations, than the blunt, harsh, painful, or offensive term... Euphemisms are sometimes helpful... but they can also desensitize us emotionally and hide reality – including moral reality. Interestingly, the dangers inherent in euphemisms were almost prophetically envisioned by George Orwell in his famous novel *1984* and in his lesser known essay “Politics and the English Language.” Orwell put forward the idea that an effective mechanism of political control is the manipulation of euphemisms employed in public discussion.”

Van der Breggan acknowledged that we all want medical help when we are dying: “clean sheets, proper nutrients, and morphine (as needed) as we die. Please, doctors and nurses, provide us with comfort as natural death takes its course.” However, MAiD “involves actively causing death – killing. Dying and killing are not the same. It’s important to be clear about this distinction and not be bamboozled by euphemisms.”

Catherine Glenn Foster, President & CEO of Americans United for Life stated, “We get to choose one: suicide prevention, or suicide advocacy. We can’t have both... [The] embrace of suicide by physician imposes a regime of suicide advocacy upon the people. There will be deadly pressure on the marginalized, the economically fragile, and the socially vulnerable to make a life-ending decision in a context ultimately devoid of real choice. Every advance of suicide advocacy is a failure of equality under the law, because it makes citizens fundamentally unequal based on their situation.”

Submitted by Regina Carbonaro 631-243-1435