

A life in need of “neither protection nor preservation”: Joseph Fletcher, Down’s syndrome and euthanasia

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Joseph Fletcher claims in his Christian situation ethic developed in the nineteen sixties that there is nothing wrong with the use of euthanasia on children born with Down’s syndrome. But is it possible to use his claim of non-persons as non-moral subjects in an ethic that claims not to be legalistic? This paper affirms that Fletcher’s claims are wrong, and that questions motivated by a lack of resources should be answered with a critical discussion regarding those resources. Not with an ethic that supports euthanasia.

Keywords: *Euthanasia, Down’s syndrome, Situation ethic, personhood, neo-casuistry, resources, philanthropy*

Euthanasia – *the good death*

The act of killing someone who is very sick or injured and suffering is and has been widely debated both by ethicist and law professionals in previous times and today. In February 2014, Belgium, which made euthanasia legal for adults in 2002, passed a bill allowing euthanasia for terminally ill children. The choice is placed with the child and has to be supported by a parental consent. This makes Belgium the first country in the world without an age limit for performing euthanasia.¹ The laws regarding euthanasia vary in Europe making the European map of euthanasia look like a patchwork of areas where the practice is legal, decriminalized or illegal.² In Switzerland assisted suicide is legal: the Swiss Dignitas Association – an organization with the motto *Menschenwürdig leben – Menschenwürdig sterben* often spurs the debate in the media.³ One controversial death that recently took place at Dignitas was the death of a woman just known by her first name, Anne. Anne, an 89 year old former art teacher is said to have ended her life because she could not cope with modern living, having no terminal illness or major physical pain. Euthanasia is in this case used as a way of ending a life before more advanced

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¹ BBC News, “Belgium’s parliament votes through child euthanasia.” <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26181615>, published 13th February 2014, viewed 12th May 2014.

² BBC News, “Euthanasia: a continent divided” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7322520.stm>, published 11th February 2009, viewed 12th May 2014.

³ <http://www.dignitas.ch>, viewed 12th May 2014.