

Moral Philosophy

- According to Socrates, the subject deals with “no small matter, but how we ought to live” and why. - Socrates in the *Republic* of Plato, 390 BC (cited from James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*)
- We will look at the concept of morality from a minimal standpoint. (common minimum program)

Baby Theresa

- anencephaly – among the worst congenital disorders – referred to as “babies without brains” - the cerebrum and the cerebellum will be missing and also the top of the skull
- brain-stem exists because of which breathing and heartbeat are possible
- In the US, if detected during pregnancy babies with anencephaly are aborted – some are still born and those born die in a few days

Ethical dilemma

- Baby Theresa Ann Campo Pearson was born in Florida in 1992 with anencephaly. Baby Theresa's parents knew that she had only a few days to live and wanted to donate her organs such as kidneys, liver, heart, eyes and lungs to other needy children.
- But Florida law forbade organ transplant from living donors. When Baby Theresa died the organs were in a bad condition.

What should a parent do in such situations

- In this specific context with the state of Florida law forbidding transplanting organs from living donors, many professional ethicists clung to traditional commandments
- The ethicists argued from three ethical theoretical perspectives:
 - 1. Baby Theresa was being used as a means to other people's ends. (Deontology – Immanuel Kant)

Ethical Theories

- 2. It is unethical to kill in order to save a person. (Thou shall not kill. (Christian Ethic) / Ethical Egoism (one's own good outweighs the good of others as a principle))
- 3. The parents of this baby want it dead to utilize its organs for the good of some other babies. (critique of Utilitarianism)

Baby Theresa's Parents' Ethical Outlook

- “If we can benefit someone, without harming anyone else, we ought to do so. Transplanting the organs would benefit the other children without harming Baby Theresa. Therefore, we ought to transplant the organs. (Benefits argument)”
- Is this a good argument?

Quality of Life Issues

- Is life as a vegetable (mere biological existence) better than living a life of quality?
- What is life?
- Benefits argument is a powerful argument.
- What about the “means to an end” argument? This is a very appealing argument. But does this argument stand scrutiny in Baby Theresa's case?

Deontological argument

- According to the great German philosopher, logician and physicist of the 18th century, Immanuel Kant, human beings must be considered autonomous agents. So, they must be held responsible for their actions as autonomous moral agents. On this basis, a person's autonomy should not be violated by treachery or trickery. But is Theresa being deceived into donating her organs?

Moral considerations in Baby Theresa's case

- 1. What would be in Baby Theresa's own interest? She cannot decide on her own and her interests won't be compromised because she would be dead soon.
- 2. What would she want if she were an autonomous agent? There is no living will. She cannot express her preferences. So, we are left with no alternative but to decide on her behalf.

Killing is a sin under any circumstances.

- Is there an exception?
- What about “brain death”?
- Are arguments in favor of the parents' of anencephalics donating the organs of their babies for transplantation to other needy babies sound?
- Would you endorse such an action?

Other cases

- 2. Conjoined Twins (Marie and Jodie) – August 2000, Gozo, Malta – brought to be operated at St. Mary's Hospital in Manchester, England – one of them have to die for the other baby to be saved – parents refuse to allow the surgery on the argument that as devout Catholics both lives are sacrosanct and so they cannot sacrifice one for the other

Euthanasia – Tracy Latimer

- 12 year old Tracy Latimer killed by her father who pumped exhaust fumes – Tracy weighed 40 pounds – The Judge of Saskatchewan farming community gave a reduced sentence – but the Supreme Court of Canada stepped in and ordered that the maximum sentence of 25 years be given to Robert Latimer for killing his child who had cerebral palsy. - Robert argued that he killed her because of her suffering not because of her handicap.

Impartiality

- What are the policy implications for ethical judgments on euthanasia, possibility of saving one due to death of other, and comatose patients?