

DAVE REITER

Euthanasia terms ambiguous

The Hemlock Society gets its chance in the state of Washington next week.

The group, which advocates legalizing euthanasia, helped gather 223,000 signatures to place Initiative 119 on Tuesday's ballot. The initiative would make it legal for physicians to provide "aid-in-dying" to their patients, provided several conditions were met.

The patient would have to be conscious and mentally competent. The patient also would have to make a written request for the aid-in-dying, and there would have to be two impartial witnesses of this request.

Finally, two physicians would have to certify in writing that the patient was suffering from a terminal illness from which death probably would result within six months.

The success or failure of Initiative 119 certainly will affect the tone of public debate on the proper medical approach to death. But even if the initiative fails, the debate will continue.

Unfortunately, the debate is clouded by ambiguous terminology. The danger in this is that some ideas or practices may become institutionalized on the basis of misunderstanding.

The phrase "right to die" is prominent in the debate but is ambiguous, fostering confusion on the morality of killing.

Under a narrow interpretation, the right to die means the patient has the right not to have others interfere with his or her death. This idea is exemplified by a case recently described in Newsweek.

Marie was a 69-year-old woman suffering from incurable emphysema and inoperable lung cancer. Her doctor suggested that she be hooked up to life-sustaining equipment. After conferring with her daughter, Marie chose not to have the treatment.

The next day Marie died.



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Using a broader interpretation, the right to die means that under certain conditions, patients have the right to kill themselves or to have themselves killed. This idea is also illustrated in the Newsweek article.

Last March in the New England Journal of Medicine, a Rochester, N.Y., doctor described how he helped a leukemia patient stockpile barbiturates so that she could commit suicide.

It is easy to see how confusion could result from failure to distinguish between the narrow and the broader interpretations of the right to die.

Someone who assumes the nar-

row interpretation might say that patients do indeed have the right to die. In a situation similar to Marie's, they too might want the freedom not to be hooked up to life-sustaining equipment.

But this same person might be outraged at the idea that a doctor should help a patient commit suicide.

So talking about the "right to die" without distinguishing between the narrow and broader interpretations obscures important differences.

The phrase "aid-in-dying" is also ambiguous. Initiative 119 defines "aid-in-dying" as follows: "aid in the form of a medical service, provided in person by a physician, that will end the life of a conscious and mentally competent qualified person in a dignified, painless, and humane manner."

This definition includes the doctor not merely providing the patient with a lethal dosage of some drug, but it also includes the doctor directly administering a lethal injection to the patient.

The result is that "aid-in-dying" hides the difference between the doctor assisting the patient in committing suicide and the doctor killing the patient.

Of course, both of these ideas are radical revisions of the Western philosophy of medicine. They are both inconsistent with all sorts of religious values, as well as the Hippocratic oath, a traditional statement of religious values.

If we are going to consider these revisionary ideas seriously, they should be stated in a clear and straightforward manner. It is dangerous to discuss such issues using catch phrases and slogans.

If we want our doctors to be both healers and killers, we should say so in plain, straightforward language.

Reiter is a graduate student in philosophy and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Professor shows contempt for students, their ideas

When Professor Joyce Ann Joyce came to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, she brought with her a wealth of teaching experience and knowledge. Her background exposed her to a combination of Eastern attitudes and Georgian ideas that ultimately would lead to a destructive cultural confrontation: teaching in a large Nebraska university; a large part of whose students have not experienced racism first-hand and do not share philosophies like those typical of people who live in the megalopolis we call the East Coast. She also brought with her an open contempt for Midwestern culture and the Midwestern people.

On the first day of a three-week session class in Afro-American literature, Joyce introduced herself, told of her background and gave her expectations. She said that she was "a very good judge" of people, and said that she had a number of us pegged already; that she already had a good idea who among us was going to make it and who wasn't. She claimed that she demands participation in her classes; that every person must get involved in class discussions. She later proved that she would be completely insensitive to the students and quick to degrade and intimidate anybody who expressed an idea or opinion contrary to her own. On the other hand, she was also quick to degrade students who agreed with her with such sarcastic remarks as, "Oh, I'm so glad that you agree with me."

Because of her abusive attitude and intimidating nature, the students of the class got together and decided collectively to appeal the grades for that course. We first went to the ombudsman, who in turn directed us to Stephen Hilliard, chairman of the English department.

It is a credit to Hilliard that he respected enough the opinions of the dozen or so students he saw that he did not recommend that the students first appeal to the instructor, which is considered standard practice and common courtesy. All involved agreed that the intimidation and hostility Joyce displayed toward the students made it unlikely that such an appeal would be productive. Besides, on the very last day, she made it clear that she would not consider such an appeal by saying about grading complaints, "speak now or forever hold your peace." Those who did speak received unsatisfactory responses. She simply called other students to read their answers, which

she considered correct, aloud. That was a common theme in her class. There is only one correct opinion or answer in any given situation — hers.

It is also a credit to Hilliard that, out of respect for Joyce's professional position, he made great efforts to be sure that the complaints could be resolved at the department level so that few students would find it necessary to go to the college with their complaints. It is to Joyce's discredit that she should interpret this act of generosity as one of aggressiveness or distrust. Because of the peculiar circumstances, the most outstanding being that the students demanded it, Hilliard exercised his authority properly in recommending that the students' papers be regraded by a panel of unbiased professors.

Joyce is fond of comparing UNL to other (read, "better") universities and the students and people to students and people from other (also read, "better") places in the country. She claimed that the students here do not recognize an inferior education when they see one. I think that her present experience proves her wrong. All of the students who filed appeals and took the reconciliatory options to receive a passing grade expressed a profound knowledge of the difference between an adequate educational experience and an inadequate one.

In her classes, students' ideas and comments were repeatedly met with criticism and intimidation. They were never met with the comments that their ideas were even worthwhile, much less profound or correct. Often they were called superficial or racist, even when their comments did not justify either label. More often they were told that their ideas were simply worthless products of the ignorant mid-American, "Eurocentric" culture in which they were raised. The idea that she was rejected as a leader and instructor because she is black is both ludicrous and troubling. It is part of what appears to be a shield of paranoia that she has built around herself and her grand delusions. The introduction of the Anita Hill case in her article is a predictably misguided attempt to foster sympathy. It cannot be claimed to be a legitimate comparison by any line of reasoning, and can thus be presumed to have been introduced only for its political impact.

Rich Ervin senior physics

LINDA KAY MORGAN

Serial killers clever, not crazy

As I sat there engulfed and mystified in a gory Stephen King novel, I wondered about committing a similar crime and having it made into a movie.

I thought about what I would like to call myself and what steps I would take to get my name across. Or would I just let the media name me by the way I would kill my victims?

Before I went on my slaughtering rage, I would first finalize all the details so that nothing would go wrong. I possibly could be the best serial killer ever. I would not quit until someone put an end to my plot.

I often wonder whether such thoughts invade a serial killer. What taunts and ravages the minds of such demented humans? Are they insane?

I think not. Anyone who saw the movie "Silence of the Lambs" witnessed an intelligent killer who laid detailed plans. Serial killers are far from crazy. They are clever.

A recent article in The Los Angeles Times charted the lives of 17 people who were murdered over a five-year span. The killer is still at large. His last victim was found Sept. 13 in Riverside County, Calif.

Some people interviewed for the story thought that the deaths were no big deal, considering that the victims were mostly drug addicts and prostitutes, as if their lives didn't matter because of the paths they took.

It is thinking like this that has gotten so many murderers off. It doesn't matter how sleazy a victim may appear to be, he or she has the right to life.

It didn't take long for the filmmakers



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to get a hold of the rights to make the story into a movie, "Roadside Justice."

That only encourages killers to continue their sprees, because they realize they too will one day have a movie about them.

The literal concept of death seems to mean nothing to them. Many commit crimes without realizing the consequences that may follow.

What goes through the minds of serial killers remains a mystery. Perhaps their actions are a way to deal with the world or a way to get their

picture on the six-o'clock news. For others, perhaps it's a way to act out the stories they have read. Whatever the reason may be for causing another's death, the act is shameless.

When will these senseless murders cease?

I don't see an end anytime soon until other people start to realize that these people are not as crazy as they appear to be when they are faced with life imprisonment or the death chair. The violence will not end until people see that something is done with these killers.

I find fault with those who think that serial killers are sick and need psychiatric assistance. It's time for a reality check. If a person has enough intellect to plan vicious murders, I would hardly say they are crazy.

Many serial killers know exactly what they are doing and how they must plead when they enter the courtroom. I am sure the first thing their attorneys tell them is to plead insanity or that they have multiple personalities in the hope of receiving a lesser charge or the chance to re-evaluate their crime in a psychiatric clinic. Instead, we either need to put them in prison for life or execute these malicious murderers. Whatever the end result may be, they don't need to be let off.

Those who support letting murderers get off may be allowing someone close to them to meet up with the killer later on.

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