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Euthanasia – A Study of the Age Long Controversial Issue in Thomas More's *Utopia*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Brian Clark's *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*

Dissertação de Mestrado em Estudos Ingleses

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FOREWORD

Manifestly, two of man's greatest desires stretching far back in time must be; firstly, to live a long, healthy and happy life, and secondly, to have an easy and dignified death. Every society known to us advocates some standing prohibiting the taking of life. Yet, ironically, it is one aspect over which man's control is greatly limited. Throughout time, thinkers from all walks of life have striven to find answers and solace to man's many incapacities and doubts above all through rhetorical and artistic devices.

Euthanasia – a traditional ethnic issue – is at present a hotly contested issue, and this study has been an endeavour to lift the veil, even if ever so slightly, on how the question of euthanasia has been dealt with in literature. In addressing the impact that such concerns have had over the creative minds of Thomas More (1478-1535), Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) and Brian Clark (1932-) in their respective literary works – *Utopia*, *Brave New World* and *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* – it has been paramount that I trace the evolution of euthanasia and all its meanings throughout the ages. If we turn to the roots of our Western tradition, it becomes strikingly evident just how many of our present-day approaches to euthanasia have as their bedrock those same philosophical and religious doctrines. Indeed, different cultures have expressed varying attitudes to self-willed death, and within English literature there is no consistency in opinions, which undoubtedly makes it all the more appealing. Unarguably, this diversity concerning the right to death varies because of a whole series of factors, in which Greek and Roman philosophical outlooks, as well as the advent of Christianity, (among other factors naturally), play a crucial role.

Bearing in mind the precariousness of straying too far from the chosen path this study hopes to keep to, it has nonetheless proven to be of utmost importance to dedicate a substantial amount of attention to the various contributions made throughout time. Thus, the first chapter (despite its length only loosely stitching ages together) is an attempt to bring some coherence to the rest of the study. Certainly, it has proven to be invaluable insomuch as interconnectivity between the three literary works is concerned.

The tendency to look backward and contemplate what others did before under similar circumstances, perhaps to reformulate current customs, has been a common practice. And, more and more, what once was accepted as inalterable fact is now promptly cast aside as misrepresentation, fantasy or outdated. Consequently, the need to address these issues has also been unavoidably fundamental for building a sound basis for this study. The Hippocratic Oath is one such instance in which the reference to physician assisted death has been re-examined a lot more closely in more recent years, and certainly it is frequently cited by advocates of pro-life and pro-choice movements. And, by the same token so have the words written by Plato, Seneca and St Augustine, among others, which continue to echo through the words of More, Huxley and Clark, for, such is the prismatic nature of human condition.

I

"THE ROAD NOT TAKEN"[1]

In order to understand the placement of euthanasia in English literature it would be necessary to understand its placement in history, philosophy, religion, culture and law, amongst many other fields of study.

This exposition is not concerned with all those tragic deaths that have been portrayed by writers, since the beginning of literature, in which characters have been disposed of. Such an undertaking would, in point of fact, prove to be scintillating, indirectly about the writers themselves, more directly about the social mannerisms and beliefs of their time. Furthermore, there is no intention of entering into any of the conflicting debates, moral or otherwise, of whether euthanasia, in all its forms, is right or wrong, good or bad. Rather, its purpose is to grasp the extent that such power has had over the creative imagination. Indeed, it will be travelling along paths that have been trodden by many other thinkers, in different cultures, for well over two millenniums.

This journey of discovery seeks answers to questions such as: how the path came to be laid out; who trod the path before us; and why some chose to part from the main path and follow another route. Whatever the outcome, it promises to be a challenging journey with many snares, obstacles and dead-ends. On this journey, there will be an endeavour to investigate how three well-known English literary writers fared. What stimulated their thoughts? What choices were made when the path forked? Did they, as in the words of the poet Robert Frost, take "the one less travelled by", and has that "made all the difference"?[2]

Not only do the three literary works under study (Thomas More's *Utopia*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Brian Clark's *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*)

[1] Robert Frost, 'The Road Not Taken,' *The Turning World*, ed. D. J. Brindley (Cape: Rustica, 1970) 96.
[2] Frost 96.

fall under quite different literary genres, but there are also almost five hundred years between the time *Utopia* was written, 1515-1516, and *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*, in 1978. Yet, despite this time span, as well as the many other distinctly different features, these three works continue to challenge fundamental truths in society and promote discussion on many levels. Such is the kaleidoscopic fabric of the human condition that whole centuries are interwoven with the thread of debate. The desire to progress towards perfection must indeed stretch out from the very first day of creation. And so, much like Theseus entered the Minotaur's labyrinth to confront the fearful monster, so too have great thinkers, philosophers, writers and scholars amongst many others, entered the intricate labyrinth of the euthanasia debate. However, unlike Theseus, who found his way out using a magical ball of twine that Ariadne had given him, they have used another powerful tool: that of the written word and sharpened it with their beliefs, wit, intelligence, and humanity.

The written word is irrefutably a powerful tool. For the most striking remark spoken today will, in all likelihood, soon be forgotten, whereas the written word, like Homer's *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*,[3] will be remembered for years still to come. Though it is admittedly necessary for practical reasons to do so, literary works cannot really be boxed into just one age like the Renaissance or Romanticism; rather, they should be regarded as embracing features of different ages. Alexander Murray puts it in a nutshell when he writes:

> … this compound or mixed-age character of literature goes far to explain the dialectic of intellectual progress … different epochs, which might never have

[3] Homer was a legendary (or perhaps mythical) early Greek poet traditionally credited with authorship of two major Greek epics *The Iliad* (*c.*750-*c.*725BCE) and *The Odyssey* (*c.*743-*c.*713BCE), among others. It is known for certain that Sir Thomas More, Aldous Huxley and Brian Clark had knowledge of these classical masterpieces of the ancient world, and that they made sporadic reference to many of these works in their own; thus reflecting the relationship between what is read and what is written, no matter how near or distant.

found any other way of speaking to each other across the chasm of time, can engage in debate within the literary canon of a single age."[4]

Thus, besides reflecting a particular period, literary works also carry the knowledge of past decades and centuries: knowledge that which is often incompatible and highly volatile, and yet it is placed in the same intellectual arena to be disputed. An amateur challenger will quite eagerly acknowledge the experienced opponent's feats while simultaneously be provocative. A literary 'mouse' takes on a literary 'lion'. For it ought to be remembered that More, for instance, did not start out as a canon of English literature, and he himself took delight in wrestling not only with his contemporaries but also with the literary inheritance left him; including the ancients. It has been this way with the timeless euthanasia debate, as timeless as the debate about free will: ideas and opinions filtered into the consciousness of writers like More, Huxley and Clark, who benefited from the availability of earlier thought. Such stimulating intellectual combat nourished and still continues to nourish thinkers and scholars in all fields of study.

In an attempt to grasp the extent that such influence had over these three great creative imaginations, I too have been led to draw on previous thought, not in any way, however, as a challenger, for I am certainly far from being regarded even as a literary 'mouse'. I shall watch, then, meekly and quietly, not in the arena but rather as a spectator peering out from among the stands.

1.1. Euthanasia – Medical Views in Antiquity

Euthanasia is an ethical issue, which has generated confusion and conflict for many centuries, and yet it remains as complex and controversial as ever. Therefore, before proceeding any further, and in the interests of clarity, perhaps it

[4] Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages: The Curse on Self-Murder*, vol. II (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 86.

would be worthwhile to explore the different meanings the word 'euthanasia' has come to have. 'Euthanasia' is derived from a combination of two Greek words – *eu* and *thanatos* – which literally means 'a good death', and originally it was believed to mean a good, easy and gentle death, as opposed to torture, violence and suffering. However, current interpretations understand 'euthanasia' to be the act of bringing about a good, easy and gentle death, which many people have come to regard as 'mercy killing'. Indeed, the pendulum has swayed for 'euthanasia'. At one time it was concerned with the manner of dying, now it refers to the action one individual has over another to bring about or allow another's death.

It is believed that the word 'euthanasia' was coined only a century after the Hippocratic Oath was written in 399BCE. However, it is curious that the ancient Greeks should think the Hippocratic Oath warranted the following passage: "I will not give a drug that is deadly to anyone if asked, nor will I suggest the way to such counsel."[5] The ambiguity hanging over this passage is tremendous and it has been subjected to a variety of interpretations. Present-day medical ethicists are, in general, inclined to view this as a rejection of euthanasia.[6] There are, nonetheless, those scholars who lean towards the interpretation that it alludes to those physicians who used their medical expertise to murder or that it concerned physicians who cooperated in executions. Activists of the right-to-die movement

[5] The Hippocratic Oath (available at www.bma.org.uk).

[6] The British Medical Association is opposed to the legalisation of euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide and regards such measures as going against the fundamental role of doctors as outlined in the Hippocratic Oath. Ultimately, the BMA holds views similar to those expressed by the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics: "Issues of life and death do not lend themselves to clear definition, and without that it would not be possible to frame adequate safeguard were it legalised […] it would be next to impossible to ensure that all acts of euthanasia were truly voluntary and that any liberalisation of the law was not abused" (BMA available at www.bma.org.uk). In accordance with the Policies of Medical Ethics of the American Medical Association, it "opposes enactment of any type of federal or state legislation that would require a physician to provide the medicines, techniques, or advice necessary for a patient to pursue a course of suicide, or which would require a physician who is unwilling to participate in suicide to refer the patient to a physician who would be willing to do so" (AMA available at www.ama-assn.policyfiles.org). Both the BMA and the AMA further interpret the passage on the administration of deadly drugs in the Hippocratic Oath as an ancient medical rejection of such acts and thus a violation of the codes of medical ethics.

generally tend to discredit this passage as being an ancient prohibition of euthanasia. Irrespective of the various assumptions, this brief passage in the Hippocratic Oath has been enlisted on both sides of contemporary euthanasia debates. Indeed, it would seem necessary then to investigate the reason why this passage was worthy of mention so long ago and how it has come to be subjected to so many interpretations.

Steven Miles, scholar and professor of geriatric medicine, has gone to great lengths to make a thorough examination of the medical ethics of the Hippocratic Oath by widening his research to ancient Greek medicine and culture. He laments that while the Hippocratic Oath is revered as an icon of medical ethics, it is sadly often misinterpreted and manipulated to suit specific needs in the modern debate about medical euthanasia and the withdrawal of life-support systems.[7] His research into the history of care for the dying in ancient Greece, as well as the history of euthanasia, has led him to believe that the passage "I will not give a drug that is deadly to anyone if asked" does not in all probability refer to modern notions of euthanasia. He writes: "… the Greek discussion of assisted suicide or euthanasia seems to have been insufficiently developed to engender such a powerful answering taboo."[8]

Earlier Greek medical practices had depended on magic and ritual but illness was not generally identified with moral impurity. Medicine was seen as a religion; and superstition, evil spirits and punishments from the gods were regarded as the real causes of illness. Moreover, it was to those very gods, and not

[7] Perhaps, also of interest is the fact that the Hippocratic Oath has been reviewed and updated progressively over the centuries to bear out society's ever-changing values, laws and medical advancements. Presently, the Hippocratic Oath has become more of a symbolic ritual and has no legal status. In fact, not all medical schools use the Hippocratic Oath, and those that do have not maintained its original form. For instance, a mere 8% of American medical schools that use the Hippocratic Oath continue to include a prohibition on abortion (an equally polemic issue) and only 14% include a ban on euthanasia. Another of the clauses, which has been removed, is the prohibition of abdominal surgery, most likely as in the past it would result in the patient's death whereas today it is a habitual procedure among skilled physicians (AMA available at www.ama-assn.policyfiles.org).

[8] Steven H. Miles, *The Hippocratic Oath and the Ethics of Medicine* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 67.

to physicians, that most ancient Greeks turned to when ill. Temples called *asclepeia*, which were run by priests, were built for those in poor health, and people would go there to bathe, sleep and meditate. Patients were encouraged to sleep, believing that Aesculapius,[9] the god of healing, and his two daughters, the goddesses Panacea and Hygieia, would visit them. A visit meant a cure for their ailments, and written accounts have survived to this day of such treatments and of those who were cured. In the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates cheer Aesculapius for his more compassionate medical practices: "He did not want to lengthen out good-for-nothing lives … Those who are diseased in their bodies, [physicians] will leave to die, and the corrupt and incurable souls they will put an end to themselves."[10]

The ancient Greeks knew that health and fitness affected their quality of life, and the Olympic Games, which have lasted to modern times, celebrated and exemplified this concern. Most citizens in the ancient Greek world were worried about the amount of exercise they had, what they ate, what they drank and how much they slept. Authority on Spartan civilization Paul Cartledge suggests that this concern was of particular relevance to Spartans.[11] Their social and political systems had to be highly structured, disciplined and military in regime. And, its citizens were expected to put service to their city-state before personal concerns

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[9] Aesculapius was the son of Apollo, the god of medicine. From *c.*500BCE-*c.*400ACE worshippers built large temple complexes all over the Mediterranean in his name. Throughout this period and into the Roman Empire people visited these temples to be healed and partook in a number of rituals like for example: massaging, fasting and purification baths. The Hippocratic Oath starts off by invoking allegiance to a selection of pagan gods: "I swear by Apollo the physician and by Aesculapius and by Hygieia and Panacea and by all the gods as well as goddesses" (see the Hippocratic Oath). Thus it is perhaps ironic that anti-choice activists, who are Christians in majority, tend to attach such a great deal of importance to the Oath. However, this is a whole other issue eagerly and often cheekily addressed by pro-choice activists. See Joyce Arthur, "Hypocrisy and the Hippocratic Oath," in *Humanist in Canada* 131 (Winter 1999/2000): .26-28.

[10] Plato, *Republic*, Book III trans. B. Jowett (New York: Nostrand, 1959) 297. Aesculapius was frequently pictured carrying a staff, forked at the top, with a snake coiled around it. This became the symbol of medicine until about the mid-sixteenth century when it was largely replaced by the caduceus. The caduceus, given to Hermes by Apollo, is a wing-topped staff, with two snakes winding about it. The caduceus has symbolised fertility, wisdom, healing and sun gods. However, the Staff of Aesculapius remains to this day the official emblem of the BMA and the AMA.

[11] Paul Cartledge, *The Spartans: The World of the Warrior-Heroes of Ancient Greece, from Utopia to Crisis and Collapse* (New York: Overlook, 2002) 80-87.

because Sparta's survival was continually threatened by its own economic foundation: the great mass of Helots. As its well being depended on the exploitation of these enslaved Greeks, Spartans had to be highly endowed physically and mentally. More than that, they had to be physically and mentally superior. Indeed, the Spartans, perhaps even more so than other Greeks, despised physical (or indeed any kind of) disability, and Spartan laughter was typically laughter at another's expense. Thus, it could certainly be argued that much of the physical training was severely eugenic in aim.

In the Greek city of Sparta, helping others die or putting them to death was considered permissible in some situations. Newborns with severe birth defects were put to death, and such children were abandoned and left to die of exposure, dehydration and starvation. Plutarch (*c*.50-*c*.125ACE), one of the most popular Greek authors at the time of the Renaissance, outlined this procedure in many of his writings, and more recently James Westendorf has graphically described:

> The father had no authority to rear his child, when born, but brought it to a place called the Lesche; here the elders of his tribe sat and examined the infant … but if it were feeble and ill-shaped, they sent it to the so called Place of Casting-Out – a chasm near Mt. Taygetos – considering that for a child ill-suited from birth for health and vigor to live was disadvantageous for itself and for the state.[12]

By the same token, Plato and Aristotle sanctioned infanticide. They justified the act as a method of ensuring that only those citizens in peak physical and mental conditions were worthy to be a part of the finely oiled machine that the state was. In the *Republic*, Plato showed contempt for "weak fathers begetting weak sons"[13] and in what seems more like a rudimentary scheme for eugenics, he has Socrates state that: "The offspring of the inferior, or of the better when they

[12] James Westendorf, "Historical Look at Euthanasia," *Christian Life Resources National Convention* (Wisconsin Lutheran College: October 12, 1996) 5.
[13] Plato, *Republic*, BOOK III 297.

chance to be deformed, will be put away in some mysterious, unknown place, as they should be."[14]

Voluntary euthanasia for the elderly and the terminally ill was also an approved custom among the Spartans. Wilson writes that: "There is some evidence that in Ceos there was an ancient custom requiring people over sixty to commit suicide – a utilitarian practice."[15] In ancient Greece, suicide was viewed as an offence against the state, and, despite the existence of taboos regarding suicide, it was embraced under certain conditions. Plato maintained that Socrates saw suffering and agonising illness as motive enough to wish for a swift and easy end to life. In the *Republic*, Hippocrates' teacher, Herodotus,[16] is criticised for: "educate[ing] diseases … and invent[ing] lingering death ... by a combination of training and doctoring [he] found out a way of torturing first and chiefly himself, and secondly the rest of the world."[17]

By no means were these practices restricted to the Spartan culture. In ancient Israel for instance, some books held that frankincense was given to kill incurable patients, and in India, they were drowned in the River Ganges.

The temptation to think that the severely ill, those with physical disabilities, or the elderly were not cared for would be misleading, for in fact Greek physicians described caring for many hopelessly ill people.[18] By law, sons were required to support their parents in their old age, a necessity in a society with no state-sponsored system for the support of the elderly or terminally ill. At first, physicians had preferred religious methods of healing but gradually scientific

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[14] Plato, *Republic*, BOOK V 347.
[15] Jerry B. Wilson, *Death by Decision: The Medical, Moral, and Legal Dilemmas of Euthanasia* (Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1975) 20.
[16] Herodotus (*c*.480-*c*.425BCE) was a Greek historian, often known as the 'father of history' because he was the first to collect his materials systematically, test their accuracy as far as he was able, and arrange them accordingly. Hippocrates would follow a similar systematic and scientific method of research.
[17] Plato, *Republic*, BOOK III 295.
[18] P. Prioreschi, "Did the Hippocratic Physician Treat Hopeless Cases?" *Gesnerus* 49 (1992): 341-350. Prioreschi argues that besides lessening the pain of the terminally ill, Greek physicians valued such care because of what they could learn from it. He further adds that "some texts argued in favour of treating mortally ill people; others said that attempting to cure those who are dying did not properly belong to medicine" (344).

methods came to replace them in many instances. Clearly, there was no recourse like the antibiotics of today, and minor injuries and infections could wind up being fatal. Alternative methods were applied, for instance, wounds were disinfected with alcohol and certain herbs. Treatments involved diet, exercise, the administration of purgatives, diuretics or emetics and bloodletting. Herbs and ointments were also used to treat patients: the stinging nettle was used as a tonic and blood purifier; mustard was used as an anti-bacterial and anti-fungal; olive oil was used extensively, as was the aroma of some flowers to relax and uplift the patient.

Those knowledgeable about customs and habits in ancient Greece would, in all likelihood, concur that Greek physicians were aware of the suffering that a disease entailed. Perceptive observations on mental illness and chronic disease were duly registered. It was noted that people who were delirious, depressed or in great suffering were inclined to refuse treatment, food or water, but physicians did not tend to see this as a sign of a rational wish to die.[19] However, healing by medicine was not always successful, so finally, if a person was unable to be cured and was so ill that nothing further could be done to help, "some material suggested that it was proper to withhold treatment that merely prolongs dying."[20]

Hippocrates made great strides in placing medical diagnosis and treatment on a scientific basis instead of on a religious one. He taught that physicians should base their knowledge on careful observation of patients and their response to remedies. He further insisted that empirically grounded clinical experience was the best guide to treatments that would not do the ill more harm than good. Emphasis was placed on the value of preserving life and in putting the good of patients above the private interests of physicians. Indeed, it is interesting to bear

[19] J. M. Cooper, "Greek Philosophers on Euthanasia and Suicide," *Suicide and Euthanasia*, ed. B. A. Brody (London: Kluwer Acad., 1989) 10. writes that Greek physicians took notes on the psychological effects of chronic illnesses, which described the wish to die as "a sign of delirium or depression" (10). Physicians would prescribe distinctive treatment for such cases: emetics, rest, comic diversion, a light diet and walks. Such recommendations were among the earliest proposals for palliative care.

[20] Miles 69.

in mind that Greek physicians practised vivisection[21] at the time the Hippocratic Oath was written, and this included cutting open people who were still alive. In this manner, they were able to discover how the body functioned. A ready supply of criminals also allowed for this controversial practice. Although this practice was condemned in some countries and regarded as a highly emotional issue, during the Ptolemaic age in Egypt, Greek anatomists were able to work in a free and unrestricted environment – much due to the philosophical teachings of Aristotle.

Of interest also is the fact that murder was not uncommon in the ancient world, and physicians, who were often bound to serve their city-state, would undoubtedly have found themselves pressured to participate in murder plots, especially as they had the skills and access to do so.[22] The Greek philosopher Plato wrote that a physician who: "administers a poison with the intention of causing death should be executed as such deeds are acts of terror."[23] Miles is of the opinion that Plato's portrayal of the 'poison-bearing physician' is "a discussion of skilled and secret assassin and bears no similarity to compassionate medical euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide."[24]

Bearing in mind all that has thus far been written, it would appear plausible then to agree with the view that the passage in the Hippocratic Oath – "I will not give a drug that is deadly to anyone if asked" – does not in all probability refer to modern notions of euthanasia. A further observation worth mention, although seemingly evident, is the fact that the technological advancements of today were not contemplated in ancient Greece at the time the Hippocratic Oath was written. Thus, the dilemma of whether or not to remove a feeding tube would

[21] Vivisection is another of the contemporary 'hot topics', which finds its birthplace in the ancient world. More, Huxley and Clark addressed this issue in their works, frequently and to differing degrees drawing on past thought.
[22] At the time the Oath was written, Sparta's defeat of Athens (405 BCE) had caused enormous upheaval. Murder eliminated successors and competitors, and it set in motion a vicious circle of revenge murders or killings to regain lost power.
[23] Plato, *The Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 933.
[24] Miles 73.

not be an issue. Yet, Miles also asserts that "although the Greek physicians recommended special diets and fluids to nourish severely ill persons, they did not describe force-feeding patients who would not take food or fluid."[25] Death was regarded as a natural and rational part of life.

1.2. Euthanasia and Suicide in Ancient History, Philosophy and Literature

In an endeavour to understand the underlying motives that led More, Huxley and Clark to address the euthanasia debate, it has become both worthwhile and essential to regard the study of suicide: for the two conditions involve both a degree of choice and free will in life or death cases. Presence of both the euthanasia and suicide debates is seen in the tremendous corpus of ancient philosophy, history and literature. And although these two impassioned debates have been travelling companions since ancient times, philosophers and thinkers among other scholars (including More, Huxley and Clark) have often embraced them on unequal terms. As previously referred, despite the time span between ancient thought and the time *Utopia, Brave New World* and *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* were written, these three literary works bear the mark of many influences existent in the ancient world. Two of the many challenges, which were met, were the tasks of having to distinguish these influences and having to evaluate independently the doctrines they carried. Thus, a more assiduous examination of the suicide debate is called for, so as to unravel the apparent paradox around the euthanasia and suicide debates. I confess that the study of suicide in English literature appears as seductive and overwhelming as that of the study of euthanasia in English literature. However, I will try to be as little burdensome and more succinct as possible so as to satisfy the needs of this exposition.

[25] Miles 76.

History itself provides innumerable detailed accounts of suicides, which have become deeply rooted, and integral parts of most cultural backgrounds. In some warrior tribes, whose ideology was courage above all else, suicide was revered as a great good. For the Vikings, for instance, only those who had a brutal death were able to enter Valhalla[26] and take part in the Feast of the Heroes. Barring death in battle, suicide was the greatest honour and the surest way to deserve an invitation; but dying serenely in bed of old age or from a disease meant a lifetime disqualification. In another great continent, it was customary among certain African tribes for warriors and slaves to commit suicide when their king died so as to join with him in Paradise.

There were other virtuous circumstances that warranted suicide. For instance, the Iglulik Eskimos and certain nomadic tribes in Mesopotamia were known to kill themselves at the onset of old age or illness. They prepared themselves for an honourable death, thus releasing the younger members of the tribe from both the hassle and the guilt of either having to look after them or kill them. One of many traditional Eskimo tales portrays an elderly and sickly member of the family slipping out into the darkness of the night to await death which nature has prepared for him: either to be overcome by the biting iciness or eaten by a starving polar bear. It was seen as a necessary and almost instinctive act for the sake of the tribe's survival.[27] Suicide en masse is at best a peculiar phenomenon but not unfamiliar: hundreds of Jews killed themselves at Masada

[26] Valhalla was the Paradise of the Vikings, where the Feast of Heroes was presided over by Odin the supreme god of war. In keeping with some traditions, Odin wounded himself before being burnt in a ritual. Irrespective of the interpretation, he committed suicide and his devotees eagerly followed his divine example.

[27] Durkheim (1858-1917), French sociologist and philosopher, called this style of suicide 'altruistic'. He cites as one of the ultimate examples the act of Captain Oates, who walked out to his death in the Antarctic snow so as to help Scott and his other ill-fated companions. See Émile Durkheim, *Suicide in Sociology,* trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: Free P, 1951) 44.

rather than yield to the Roman legions; and thousands of Indians preferred death to the ill treatment of the Spanish conquerors in the New World.[28]

The ancient Greeks were known to tolerate suicide. While there were certainly taboos against taking one's own life, they were more related to the more acute Greek aversion of killing one's own kin.[29] These attitudes of abhorrence were also mostly sustained among the lower classes as opposed to the higher classes, which showed signs of adopting different sets of ethics and morals in regards to tolerance and acceptance. Throughout the period of classical Greece and later on with the establishment of the Roman Empire the number of suicides increased. Grounds for suicide varied from upholding personal honour, avoiding suffering (physical or otherwise), showing patriotism to the state and demonstrating mourning for the death of a loved one.

Prior to the Hippocratic Oath being written, ancient Greek drama portrayed characters killing themselves. Homer (*c.*750-*c.*710BCE) wrote about self-murder as being natural, an act of courage or an honourable end. Believing his son to have been killed by the Minotaur, Aegeus flung himself into the sea; Leukakas jumped off a rock so as not to be raped by Apollo: the legends of Greek Mythology continue to bear him witness. Sophocles (496-406BCE) described two of the more celebrated suicides of antiquity – Jocasta, the wife and mother of Oedipus, and Ajax, the shamed soldier.[30]

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[28] These subjects are dealt with in more detail in several of the essays on suicide in B.A. Brody, ed., *Suicide and Euthanasia* (London: Kluwer Acad., 1989).

[29] The habitual punishment was to sever the right hand from the suicide and bury the corpse separately, outside the city. It later became common practice to drive a stake through the heart and bury the body at a crossroads.

[30] Although there are many scholars who acknowledge the Roman tragedies of Seneca as mostly having influenced English theatre, it is also true that the works of many early Greek dramatists, poets and authors had an equally far-reaching impact. And it must be remembered that Seneca himself absorbed much from the Ancient Greeks, who came to occupy central parts in English literature throughout the ages, particularly once their works were translated. For instance, Aeschylus (525-456BCE) was an Athenian tragic poet who gained true popularity from the 19th century when interest in Aeschylus became a feature of the Romantic Movement. Milton's *Samson Agonistes* was the first work in English to bear the stamp of Sophocles. Dryden's *Oedipus*, though seven years later, is chiefly indebted to Seneca. It was in the nineteenth century that Sophocles really came into favour. Shelley read him on his last fatal sailing-trip. In the twentieth century, Freud hit on the term 'Oedipus Complex' to describe certain features of infantile sexuality.

These suicides, however, were occasioned by shame and not by illness.

Many are the renowned cases of suicide that have been well documented and discussed in literature throughout the ages. For example, a celebrated attempted suicide motivated by mourning is Paulina's. When Nero gave order for Seneca to commit suicide, she insisted on dying with him. Tacitus gives his account of the episode:

> Seneca did not oppose her brave decision … 'Solace in life was what I commended to you', he said. 'But you prefer death and glory. I will not grudge your setting so fine an example. We can die with equal fortitude. But yours will be the nobler end.' Then, each with one incision of the blade, he and his wife cut their arms.[31]

Another well-known suicide who was driven by the desire to preserve honour and demonstrate patriotism to the state was Cato's, who supposedly after having read the *Phaedo* through twice fell on his own sword. It is with Plato that serious philosophical thought begins to get documented, and in the *Phaedo* immortality of the soul is the main theme. Plato has Socrates discuss suicide in one of the dialogues. Socrates makes reference to the Pythagorean doctrine that a man has a duty to preserve his life. On the one hand, it appears that by referring to the Pythagorean doctrine, Socrates is disposing of his own decision to kill himself. In other words, as man is God's child, he is not simply the property but also the soldier of the gods; thus suicide is tantamount to desertion. On the other hand, he also provides a loophole by stating that God, however, may send him a motive to end his life. Socrates then states that these exceptions are namely that of painful

[31] Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, ed. Betty Radice and trans. Michael Grant (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 244. Tacitus (*c.*55ACE-*c.*115ACE) was a historian of Imperial Rome who avowed to keep alive the memory of virtuous and vicious actions so that posterity could judge them. He was also influential as a stylist in the seventeenth century. Tacitus became in Donne's phrase the 'Oracle of Statesmen' and his influence is present in *Biathanatos* (1644), a defence of suicide. Paulina did not however succeed in ending her life. Nero, who had nothing personal against her and because he hoped to avoid increasing his bad reputation for undue cruelty, ordered that she be spared.

illnesses or incurable diseases, or of when the soul is sent for by the gods; and in saying so he leaves a wide spectrum for interpretation. To this day, scholars have not always seen eye to eye whether Plato agreed with suicide or not. His words have often been interpreted as a recommendation for euthanasia.

Indeed, Plato seems to be in a middle position. In his later work, *The Laws*, he claims that suicide is a disgraceful and cowardly act undertaken by weak individuals too lazy to deal with life's vicissitudes: perpetrators should be buried in unmarked graves. He stresses that suicide is a selfish act, which greatly wrongs the state. Yet once again, Plato makes allowances for people tormented by unbearable misfortune (including physical suffering due to illness) and dishonour, and he even advocates suicide for those overwhelmed by evil desires.[32]

Aristotle, Plato's pupil, adopts a distinctly different approach. The question of whether the suicide is courageous or not comes up in the *Phaedo*, and whereas Plato partially and indirectly condones suicide under certain circumstances, Aristotle is quite adamant in his response: "to kill oneself to escape from love or poverty or anything else that is distressing is not courageous."[33] Aristotle reasons that suicide is an offence against the state, thus killing oneself in order to flee from personal physical or mental torment, only reveals a weak, selfish, undignified and unworthy character. He argues that suicide involves running away from a problem and therefore cannot be regarded as 'good' or 'virtuous'.

Perhaps, what is most striking about Plato and Aristotle's passages on suicide is the comparative deficiency in concern for individual well-being or freedom. To a considerable extent, the bases they provide to condemn suicide address the social roles and obligations an individual has towards the state. They use the analogy of a slave who disobeys his master by killing himself, and so in

[32] Plato, *The Laws, Book IX*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 873.
[33] Aristotle, *The Ethics, Book III*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (New York: Penguin, 1980) 130.

much the same way the state is cheated out of a citizen. Hence, the state is more than justified to attach a penalty to anyone who chooses to do so.[34]

Beyond doubt, Plato and Aristotle's recognised stature ensured that a substantial amount of their writings was secured and after them there would be no shortage of philosophical writing. New schools flourished and set off on their own journeys of discovery. There were those who did not wander too far from the main path trodden by travellers before but there were many others who chose to part from the main path and follow another route. The dialectic between euthanasia and suicide was no exception. At this point it would be worthwhile to recall that as the terms 'euthanasia' and 'suicide' did not carry the social load or contemporary meanings of today, it would not be reasonable to regard one without the other.[35] For despite years of changes in definitions, the two concepts have continued to overlap. The different views held by different schools reflected the drift in their ethics, which were accordingly registered in a substantial corpus of writings. Future scholars and literary thinkers, many centuries later, would pause appreciatively on these words and bask in the magnitude of their enlightenment.

There were two influential schools of philosophy that stood in opposition to suicide. The first, the Pythagoreans (*c.*550BCE), perceived life as a course set by the gods and from which no man could sway. Farberow writes that Pythagoras had a theory of numbers which suited this purpose: "he hypothesized there were just so many souls available for use in the world in any given moment … with suicide the spiritual mathematics were upset … no other soul was ready to fill the

[34] Unavoidably, Aristotle does have to confront the troublesome question of whether a man can be *unjust* towards himself, and he takes quite some time thrashing out the paradoxes. He seems to reach the conclusion that ultimately the injustice is to the *polis*, which can be translated as 'state', 'city' or 'society', for no one suffers an injustice voluntarily. He argues that suicide pollutes the city and weakens it economically by destroying a useful citizen. See Alban McCoy, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Christian Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2004) 107-113.

[35] In the 2002 edition, the Macmillan English Dictionary defines 'euthanasia' as "the practice of killing a very old or very ill person without causing them pain." 'Suicide' is defined as "the action of deliberately killing yourself." As previously mentioned, in ancient times, 'euthanasia' meant a good and easy death, thus by the same token 'suicide' could be regarded as a possible vehicle to reach that end.

gap in the world caused by the sudden exit."[36] The second school of philosophy, the Aristotelians (*c*335-*c*.322BCE), regarded the act of suicide as going against the best designs of the state, and thus forbidden and punishable by law.

Three of the more influential schools of philosophy, which nurtured an acceptance of suicide, were the Epicureans, the Stoics and the Cynics. Epicurus (341-270BCE) was founder of the school of philosophy that bears his name. An adamant believer in and defender of free will, he considered the absence of pain – or peace of mind – as the greatest good. The Epicureans' overriding principle to life was unquestioningly pleasure: whatever boosted pleasure was good, and whatever generated pain was evil. Conventional moralists tended to describe him as a despicable pleasure-seeker. Diogenes (early third century ACE), founder of the Cynic school, supposedly dismissed Plato and Aristotle's concerns with social matters, arguing that insofar as morals were concerned a man had only himself to answer to. Accordingly, a man was entitled to kill himself if it pleased him to do so. It then naturally followed that this principle encompassed the desire to escape from physical or mental torment. It is claimed that Diogenes died by holding his breath, simply because he had grown weary of old age. Zeno of Citium (*c*.334-262BCE), founder of Stoic philosophy and the most influential of late Greek schools, apparently adopted a similar exit to life. At the ripe old age of ninety-eight, he tripped and put a toe out of joint, an episode that left him

[36] Norman Farberow, ed., *Suicide in Different Cultures* (London. U Park P, 1975) 5. Pythagoras's religious teachings centred on the doctrine of metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls from man to man, man to animal, or animal to man, in a process of purification or punishment. Interestingly, Shakespeare makes reference to this Pythagorean doctrine in *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*.

disgusted enough to go home and hang himself.[37]

Essentially, in all periods, Greek ethics centres around two terms – *eudaimonia* and *arete* – that are traditionally translated as 'happiness' and 'virtue'. What ought to be borne in mind is that the translation of these two terms is prone to be misleading in a few circumstances, and a deeper study of the relationship between *eudaimonia* and *arete*, and their contemporary counterparts 'happiness' and 'virtue', would indeed prove to be enlightening. The significance of these issues about translation is made more apparent when addressing the fundamental question, which concerned all of the Greek ethical philosophers: how should a man live, in order to achieve *eudaimonia*?[38] Christopher Rowe argues that if such a question were understood to mean simply 'What makes for a happy life?', almost anything might suit that description. He writes that: "it would imply that Socrates took a fundamentally hedonistic position, which is certainly untrue: if in any sense he died for his beliefs, it was not the pleasure of doing so that motivated him."[39] Rowe maintains that only Epicureans, among the other significant philosophical schools, equate *eudaimonia* with pleasure. All the others regard it on the whole as an open question, regardless whether pleasure or enjoyment is even part of the *eudaimon* life.

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[37] I came across another version that Zeno stubbed his toe and was so disgruntled that he refused to eat and in so doing starved himself to death. Cleanthes (331-232BCE) his successor apparently died with similar philosophical poise. Such attitudes seem at the very least bizarre for someone standing barely over the threshold of the twenty-first century, and certainly a tad too extreme for earnest present-day activists of the right-to-die movement. Contrarily, in Classical Greece, suicide was determined by tranquil, though somewhat exaggerated, 'good sense'.

[38] Which incidentally, is also one of the main issues encountered in *Utopia*, *Brave New World* and *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* and whose relevance to the euthanasia debate will be discussed accordingly in later chapters.

[39] Christopher Rowe, "Ethics in Ancient Greece," *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 123. See also Mary Midgley, "*The Origins of Ethics*," in Peter Singer 3-13. Compulsory suicide, which may be compared with compulsory euthanasia, was practised as a means of execution in Graeco-Roman society. Socrates was found guilty of corruption of the young and neglect of the gods, and he was condemned to death by compulsory suicide. Committing suicide in this way usually meant drinking a potent preparation of hemlock. Such was Socrates' choice to end his life. Hemlock, a plant of the parsley family, produces peripheral muscular paralysis with a swift and painless death from respiratory paralysis.

It is true that overall most ancient thinkers appear to have favoured suicide, justifying killing oneself as a means to an end: an end which could lead to *eudaimonia*. Thus, I have found it curious, though probably not surprising, to learn that there are records of those, within the same philosophical schools, who in fact were known to have dissuaded people from killing themselves, even if it meant having to endure tremendous suffering.[40] While the Epicureans professed to be as apathetic to life as they were to death, for the Stoics: "the ideal was more dignified ... life had to be in accordance with nature … when it no longer seemed to be so, then death came as a rational choice befitting a rational nature."[41] It was nonetheless Stoic philosophy, sustained by these two pillars of moral doctrine, rationality and freedom, that was to flourish. Within a hundred years of Socrates' death, the Stoics had turned suicide, which by its very nature is heterogeneous and subject to evolution, into the most rational, reasonable and desirable of ways out. Alvarez has explained this belief: "the more sophisticated and rational a society becomes, the further it travels from superstitious fears and the more easily suicide is tolerated … Stoic writing is full of exhortations to suicide."[42]

This view does in fact seem to fit in with what lies at the core of Stoic philosophy: what separates a man from an animal – his capacity to reason; rational man *versus* irrational animal. It was irrational to be afraid of death, because after all what harm could death possibly bring about if one was not there to experience it? And so in view of such moral indifference, when circumstances or 'necessity' called for an exit from life, suicide became an act of the highest

[40] That being said, does that not describe the conflicting positions of the present ongoing euthanasia debate, namely pro- and anti-choice movements? The philosophers of ancient Greece were in their personal ideologies as far from consensus as philosophers and physicians today. Such is the character of human nature: always questioning, always challenging, and always seeking answers in the hope of progressing.

[41] A. Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (Wiltshire: Redwood P, 1971) 53. Although I shall give a brief overview of the influence of Stoicism, other ideals particular to Stoic philosophy will be seen more clearly and dealt with in more depth at a later stage; especially as their presence and influence is felt consistently throughout in More, Huxley and Clark's works.

[42] Alvarez 54. Murray is of the opinion that Stoic reasoning was of an extremely high level, that it was more of: "a transcendent entity to be shared in and attuned to, rather than a mere human faculty...once a man had seen a rational course of action he had no choice but to follow it, as if mere recognition involved a kind of necessity." (Murray, *Suicide*, II 133)

quality, a powerful sign of rational free will. The Stoics, like other philosophers, wrote with a fair knowledge of their predecessors, and adopted certain traditional ideals, thus the Stoic's choice of criteria as to when there was a 'necessity' to exit life coincide with other philosophical views. The instances that warranted such exits are as follows: to avoid revealing information under duress; poverty (it was considered better to die than to accept help from scoundrels); incurable illness or intolerable pain; and insanity. Advanced old age and physical disability were also considered to be justifiable motives for killing oneself.

Worthy of mention here is the fact that the choice of criteria did assuredly differ from philosopher to philosopher because each criterion mirrored a philosopher's paradigm of values: what he regarded as virtuous, be it health, material possessions, family or society. There was however one principle that Stoic philosophers generally tended to agree upon and that was in order for life to be worthwhile holding on to, there had to be an opportunity to enjoy freedom. An incurable illness or intolerable pain might not have allowed for it, and so most philosophers would concur that under those conditions suicide was tolerable. As aforementioned, not all thinkers held that bringing an end to life was the best alternative, regardless of circumstance. And so the debate over what should be considered as justifiable life-ending criteria continued. Indeed, it has been pretty much this way up to present times. However, in no instance did Stoics approve of suicide propelled by passion, because the rational man did not kill himself with unnecessary savagery, least of all in public. In other words, killing oneself was not a decision to be taken lightly; but rather it demanded long drawn out and careful forethought, often with counsel sought from highly respected members of society. Thus, by committing suicide in such a way: "you could show beyond the possibility of contradiction what your values were. The integrity of a true philosopher was consummated if he died that way. He was literally a martyr, in the sense of a supreme 'witness' (Greek: *martyr*)."[43] It could therefore be argued

[43] Murray II 136.

that one of the accomplishments of the Greeks was to rid suicide of all the primitive superstitions and apprehensions, allowing for the deed to be discussed somewhat rationally, and relatively void of emotion.

The Roman Empire's expansion into the Hellenistic east, fuelled by hungry ambition, stern morality and love of freedom, provided an abundance of fertile minds for the seeds of Stoic philosophy to be sown and to thrive. These seeds of thought were to become firmly rooted in Rome, and Roman Stoicism would seem to be the ultimate example of an absolute toleration of suicide; a toleration that flourished above all in Roman educated circles. There is certainly no shortage of reputed Romans who had occasion to demonstrate such outstanding personal virtue and who chose to part from life's terrestrial path: Cato, Seneca, Brutus, Cassius, Mark Anthony and Nero, to mention but a handful. Contrary to the Greeks, the Romans reendowed suicide with emotion, transforming it into a functional assessment of virtue and excellence.

The framework of duties that Greek Stoicism indoctrinated – courage, determination, restraint, independence, upright conduct, fairness, unpretentious and simple habits, rationality and obedience to the state – was to many Romans undeniably appealing and corresponded quite intimately with the traditional Roman idea of *virtus* – the Greek equivalent of *arete*. Essentially, both doctrines thought the world to be governed by a divine providence; it was man's duty to live in observance with such divine will. In order to do so, firstly, he had to keep his life in alignment with the laws of nature, and secondly, he had to yield himself unconditionally to whatever destiny might send him. In other words, the innate gift of reason that man is born with had to be set free, nurtured and perfected so as to set him apart from the irrational savage animal. Thus, a man could attain a higher level and comprehend that: "there's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so, discipline the pleasures and the passions, and generally subordinate

the body and emotions to the mind and soul."[44] Common everyday human emotions had to be suppressed and smothered: the desired target was *apatheia* (immunity to feeling). In this manner, man would be able to master his fears: fear of pain, fear of sorrow, fear of superstition, fear of death, and thus reach that higher ideal – *arete* (in Greek) or *virtus* (in Latin).

Stoicism never came to exert the same influence among the common people of Rome, who saw the nucleus of Stoic philosophy as too overbearing, distant, and complex. Rather, it was the authoritarian Roman elite that first came to notice and be drawn to Stoic philosophy around the middle of the second century BCE. The need for a more flexible moral lining allowed Stoic teachings to be tightly stitched into the rigid fabric of Roman society. Once the Greek language was mastered, it allowed for the eventual absorption of Greek thought into Latin writings, leaving a notable mark for ages yet to come. The most noted Roman Stoics, Cicero (106-43BCE) and Seneca (*c*.4BCE-*c*.65ACE) did not limit themselves to Stoic doctrines and were well versed in all Greek philosophy. Seneca wrote in a letter to a friend: "My thought for today is something which I found in Epicurus … I actually make a practice of going over to the enemy's camp – by way of reconnaissance, not as a deserter!"[45] And, unless the history of written knowledge is misleading, this is a habitual practice among thinkers in general. In no way can it be surprising therefore that More, Huxley and Clark followed such tradition and that such influence remains mirrored in their writings. It was both Cicero and Seneca's writings that would become the canon of good Latin literature throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

Seneca, at one time tutor to Nero, is credited with having bestowed some humanity on Roman Stoicism. His letters are a clear indication of how he humanises Stoicism by placing the philosopher on a level where others feel he can

[44] Robin Campbell, introduction, *Letters from a Stoic*, by Seneca, ed. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 15. The issue of controlling and suppressing feelings also comes up in More, Huxley and Clark's works, and the connection between these and ancient philosophical ideals will be seen much more clearly in chapters ahead.
[45] Seneca II: 34.

be approached for counsel or comfort: "What we say should be of use, not just entertaining."[46] Believing the philosopher and the wise man to be one and the same person, Seneca is adamant when he writes that: "Philosophy teaches us to act, not to talk."[47] It is further clearly evident that Seneca holds that virtue is to be regarded as its own reward and vice as its own punishment. "His tremendous faith in philosophy as a mistress," writes Campbell, "was grounded on a belief that her end was the practical one of curing souls, of bringing peace and order to the feverish minds of men pursuing the wrong aims in life."[48]

The philosopher Seneca wrote at great lengths on the subject of suicide, a quasi-obsession, which perhaps can in part be explained by the chronic ill health that vexed him throughout his life or the insecurity of life under Nero's paranoid rule. Seneca actually rules out the option of suicide if the act were to bring about eventual harm to a friend.[49] However, should the path to a happy and flourishing life be inaccessible, then suicide is justifiable, irrespective of the character or virtue of the potential suicide in question. In order to attain happiness, certain natural advantages (such as a reasonable quantity and quality of physical and mental health) are necessary. Whosoever recognises that such natural advantages are nonexistent, he is considered wise to acknowledge that bringing an end to life neither enhances nor diminishes moral value. True to Roman tradition, the underlying principle was that to live nobly also meant to die nobly and at the right moment: dominant free will and rational choice were paramount.

Regardless of whether or not Seneca's writings may still be considered ideal paradigms of virtue and happiness, it remains remarkable that many of his ideas are ahead of his time. For instance, in Letter XV, his recommendation to "devotees of physical culture" to do things within limits and set time aside for the

[46] Seneca LXXV: 121.
[47] Seneca XX: 72.
[48] Campbell, *Letters from a Stoic*, 19.
[49] In Letter LXXVIII, Seneca openly admits that the only reason he was kept from killing himself was because of the destructive reaction it was likely to have on his father: "Having in mind not how bravely I was capable of dying but how far from bravely he was capable of bearing the loss, I commanded myself to live. There are times when even to live is an act of bravery" (131).

spirit still rings true for present day fitness fanatics caught up in the fashion-propelled frenzy that seems to attribute more importance to the physical than to the mental or spiritual well-being. Seneca also believed inherently in the equality and brotherhood of all men irrespective of social or racial background. In Letter XLVII, he discusses this idea more fully in regards the position of slaves, and his ideas actually contributed greatly to bettering the legal situation of slaves. Ultimately, he was sowing the seed for a future international law of basic human rights.[50]

Cicero's perspective on suicide is more complex to pin down than Seneca's;[51] for his literary style, mostly in dialogue, allows for him to put words in the mouths of others, and it is not always clear whether they are his own thoughts: a technique to avoid undue commitment. Cicero, who is perhaps more ethically social than Seneca, considers that a man has obligations towards society, although he also regards private good to be equally important. Unlike their Greek teachers, Cicero and Seneca have a distinctive Roman particularity, which is the emphasis placed on political freedom. Indeed, Roman law was quite practical and the private citizen was not punished for committing suicide if it was caused justifiably by: "impatience of pain or sickness, or by another cause," or still by, "weariness of life … lunacy, or fear of dishonour."[52]

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[50] In this letter, Seneca poses a curious and well-known paradox in writing "even a slave is free" (129).

[51] Seneca wittingly developed a quasi-conversationalist tone in his writing and used common everyday expressions generously. And yet, the style in his essays (many scholars consider him to be the first essayist) and even in his letters seems so polished, so mesmerising, so seductive and easy on the ear. I have come across criticism that Seneca has an enormous tendency to repetition. Nonetheless, his influence and appeal have prevailed for centuries. Perhaps, these very elements are what make his work so seductive, for indeed, there is hardly a sentence that might not be quoted. Dante, Chaucer and Petrarch greatly esteemed his writings and frequently quoted from him. Erasmus, close friend to Sir Thomas More, used many quotations from Seneca's prose works as did the French moralist and essayist Montaigne. Seneca's popularity and influence on English literature is also evident in the works of other writers such as Lyly, Nash, Philip Sidney, Bacon, Donne, Ben Jonson, Henry Vaughan, Cowley, Dryden, Pope and Burton, among many others.

[52] Alvarez 57. There were nonetheless instances in which suicide was considered a crime under Roman law. Firstly, if the act was irrationally motivated, and secondly if it had damaging economic effects: against the capital investments of the slave-owning class or the treasury of the state. Just as a slave was seen as the property of his owner, a soldier was also the property of the State, thus suicide was tantamount to damaged goods or desertion respectively.

Perhaps the most significant milestone with far-reaching influence in the philosophical history of suicide, and also indirectly euthanasia, was the advent of Christianity. And, from then on written culture pretty much became a religious culture.[53] The establishment of Greek Stoicism in Rome coaxed Latin recollections of Stoicism down the same suicidal path. Aspects of Stoic ethics became firmly embedded in Christian doctrine and, in fact, they were often taken for Christian values. Paradoxically, Stoicism undeniably exercised a lasting influence on Christianity. These suicide-tolerant beliefs should somehow have imperilled Christian orthodoxy, but Murray writes that one of the reasons they did not was in part because of:

> … the conditions that had preserved the philosophers' memory in the first place. Unlike the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, those of the late Greek schools were circulated largely in anecdote. Suicide and anecdote go together. At least, they do so when the suicide is committed sufficiently far away and with some ideological purpose behind it.[54]

A further reason why it should hardly be surprising that many Stoic values became so deeply entrenched in those of Christianity's is that many are fundamentally synchronous. One of the taxing tasks that early scholastics (including those in the Middle Ages and Renaissance) would have to tackle was how to evaluate this heirloom from antiquity, and how to sift through the doctrines they carried. Literary 'lions' and 'mice' were nonetheless influenced

[53] Suicide to avoid forfeiting an estate during the proceedings in a trial also qualified as a crime. In a nutshell, under Roman law, suicide was not as much a moral or religious crime but rather it was above all economic. The relevance of this to the euthanasia debate and More, Huxley and Clark's writings will also be developed further at a later stage. But just a brief aside, it is worthwhile to bear in mind one of the initial aims of this study which is the interconnectivity between different fields of study; of which law certainly has an equally preponderant standing. Particularly as Western law has as its foundation ancient Roman law.

[54] Murray II 129. In his *Utopia,* Sir Thomas More appears to recommend euthanasia for those suffering from painful and incurable diseases. However, the satirical and fantastical tone of his work makes it doubtful whether in fact he approved of such an act. The island of Utopia is certainly "far away", and therefore the idea can be regarded as anecdotal or perhaps More had "some ideological purpose behind it".

either way in the process. And, although not all scholars read such philosophical doctrines in the original Greek language, there is no question as to whether they had knowledge of them, and by the Middle Ages, a sizeable number of Greek texts were already available in Latin.

Yet a third reason is that roughly around the middle of the third century, the nucleus of intellectual trend began to shift from one philosophical tendency to another, namely Stoicism to Neoplatonism. With this shift in philosophical tendencies, it was inevitable that philosophical thought on suicide would be affected. Intellectual trends are not however impermeable to external influences, and indeed although their nuclei remain distinct, there are areas in which they overlap. Philosophy had become more introspective and sedentary. Thus, life was regarded as a sacred and precious gift worthy of absolute respect, and which no mere mortal had the right to take, irrespective of circumstance. Finally, the law of nature prohibited suicide, and by the same token euthanasia, because it went against self-preservation. Murray believes that it was more: "It was not so much that authority was restored to Plato's Pythagorean gods … a characteristically Neoplatonist metaphysic of spirit and matter found a new compulsion, as strong as anything in Stoicism, for *never* committing suicide."[55] Contrary to the Stoic ideal that if ill health prevented the attainment of a higher level of understanding, rationality and free will would prescribe suicide. For the Neoplatonist, ill health like other external factors were circumstantial, and the ideal rested in reaching a higher level of understanding through the cleansing of the soul.

The most influential literary inheritance of medieval scholars was the Vulgate – the cornerstone of Christian scholasticism. St Jerome's Latin version of the Bible was completed in *c.*404ACE, and it laid the foundations upon which medieval learning would rest: adding to the Renaissance scholar's bookshelf. Reference is made in the Bible to eight suicides, which are carried out successfully – Samson, Saul and Judas's to name but three of the better known.

[55] Murray II 143. Durkheim approaches this shift in tendency with much insight and attention to detail (228-239).

There are also other allusions, although slight, made to suicide: failed attempts at suicide and the contemplation of the appeal of suicide. By and large, Christian doctrine condemns suicide and euthanasia as being morally wrong, but interestingly, there is no passage in the Bible that manifestly condemns either act, nor is there any reference as how to dispose of the suicide's body.[56] In the first three centuries of the Christian era, there was no express comment made concerning suicide in general, or more specifically of those suicides in the Bible. It was only towards the middle of the fourth century that suicide would once again merit more substantial comment, indicating a need for the Church to speak out on this issue, more exactly: a need to disprove heretics or pagans and restore stability.[57]

One of the earliest commentators of special note was the Greek Origen (*c*.185-254ACE), whose works were rejected by Church orthodoxy thus undermining any influence his commentary might have wielded; and another was the Latin Jerome (*c*.345-420ACE), whose translation of the Bible into Latin secured him a prestigious position among the early Church Fathers. Both spoke out fiercely against suicide, although Jerome allowed for a single exception: suicide was permissible if it was the only means to prevent the loss of virginity. Towards the end of the fourth century, Christian voices were already being heard speaking out against pagan philosophers and certainly against their suicide doctrines. Suicide was denounced as an act that went against nature, and only God had the right to take life. It became the gravest of all crimes. Amundsen explains this silent shift in moral opinion:

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[56] There is one suicide, which totters undecidedly on that thin line between suicide and euthanasia. Saul was gravely wounded on the battlefield whilst fighting against the Philistines. Overwhelmed by tremendous pain (his wounds were far too grave for any possible cure), and reluctant to be taken prisoner, he opted for suicide as the swiftest and most honourable way to end it all. Such biblical passages have been subjected to varied interpretations and debate among scholars and specialists in this particular field of study. For more detailed commentary on this issue see Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages: The Violent against Themselves*, vol. I (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 91-97, as well as John Donnelly, *Suicide: Right or Wrong?*, (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1990) 22-27.

[57] See D. W. Amundsen, "Suicide and Early Christian Values," *Suicide and Euthanasia*, ed. B. A. Brody (Kluwer Acad.: London, 1989) 72-153.

> In the late fourth century Latin West there was therefore a doctrinal vacuum. There is no evidence that suicide was a debated issue in the Christian community. Moral views were changing, but on no explicit grounds. That the vacuum was filled, early in the fifth century, was due not to biblical commentary, but to developments in the Church itself, developments which might be called its growing pains.[58]

These "growing pains" will now serve to introduce the distinct figure that is generally credited with offering the first thoroughgoing justification of the Christian prohibition on suicide. Manifestly, the early church fathers opposed suicide, but it is St Augustine (354-430ACE), Bishop of Hippo, who made an unequivocal and blanket condemnation of suicide. His influence within theological circles extended well into the centuries ahead, and he was regarded as a reference of weight: the exemplary Christian moral commentator on suicide. It is all very well to state that Augustine not only spoke out but also wrote feverishly against suicide. However, the need now arises to examine the reasons (the Church's co-called "growing pains") for his interest in undertaking such a task, one, which had been somewhat semi-dormant until then.

Firstly, lets backtrack to the onset of the Roman persecution of Christians, which had begun in the generations previous to Augustine's. To the Romans, Christianity presented both a new political challenge and it also provided a new outlet for the bloodthirsty crowds at the Coliseum, as thousands upon thousands of Christians were tortured to death or fed to the lions, in front of a 'live audience'.[59] Christians, who were being persecuted for their unwavering faith, ironically assimilated Roman attitudes towards death and suicide. Alvarez argues

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[58] Amundsen 141.

[59] Of the main purposes behind the construction of the Coliseum had been firstly, to win political favour and secondly, to entertain the crowds. Farberow affirms that in one month thirty thousand men died in gladiatorial shows (7). And even more mind-shattering is the fact that at one time people would actually offer to commit suicide in public so as to raise money for their destitute family; the slower the method of death the more spectacular and thus the more money to be received. This kind of 'show' lasted well into the late eighteenth century, and, actually, it was not a custom unfamiliar to the English.

that Stoic philosophy had been so easily accommodated into Roman philosophy, perhaps because it was a last resistance against the "murderous squalor of Rome itself."[60] He goes further stating that for that same reason Stoicism blended in with the "religious hysteria" of the early Christians.[61] And, in part, I am tempted to agree with him on this point. For indeed, it is true that in Imperial Rome, the crowds were entertained watching shows in which they would settle for nothing less than death. The more blood that was spattered the more spectacular the show, and it was all quite run-of-the-mill. Indeed, the crowds took such delight and pleasure in such gruesomeness that it only seems reasonable to consider such vulgar craving for blood as a sign of lunacy. So when Christians began to be persecuted it only fuelled their enthusiasm further. Alvarez writes that: "Christianity which began as a religion for the poor and rejected, took that bloodlust, combined it with the habit of suicide, and transferred both into a lust for martyrdom. Martyrdom was a Christian creation as much as a Roman persecution."[62]

Indeed, this indifference to death depended upon zealotry on the verge of insanity. However, if one were momentarily to speculate on this quasi-nonchalant attitude to death, it would at first glance actually seem to make sense. After all Christian doctrine preached that life was filled with temptation, sin, and pain, and that eventual release awaited believers upon death. Eternal glory and happiness was so near so it would seem absolutely rational, reasonable and desirable, therefore, to embrace death so eagerly. Deliverance lay but a mere slash of a blade away. Those whose lives were forcefully taken or who committed suicide, in the name of their devotion to their faith, (or equally, in the case of women to preserve their virginity), became martyrs and thus accordingly eventual candidates to sainthood. But, once again, and history can attest to this, acts of this nature have a tendency to run awry.

[60] Alvarez 57.
[61] Alvarez 59.
[62] Alvarez 58.

The situation began to deteriorate, and contrary to what would be expected, the conversion of Constantine to Christianity did not snuff out the enthusiasm of potential candidates to sainthood.[63] Rather, it presented Christians with new dilemmas: how could a true Christian demonstrate his faith now that there was no cause for death, and where were martyrs to come from? The answer came in the form of fanatical sects within the Church itself, from which the Donatists and Circumcellions, among others, stand out for their excessiveness. Their lust for martyrdom was so extreme that they seemed enveloped in a frenzy of madness, abhorring life and desiring death.[64] So extreme were their attitudes, in view of the Church's new status, that the Church was obliged to declare them heretics.[65]

In view, therefore, of the torrent of reckless self-murder and the threat it brought upon any form of cohesion and stability within the Church, Augustine felt compelled to address the urgency of the situation. He did, nonetheless, recognise the predicament in addressing these longstanding Christian teachings and historical currents. Besides the suicides in ancient Greek and Latin literature far outnumbering those in the Bible, they had also seeped into popular myth. For instance, Lucretia and Cato's suicides were highly valued, morally and

[63] It is not certain exactly when the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, but it is estimated somewhere between 312 and 337ACE. At this point, historians tend to agree that the already unstoppable advancement of Christianity took on new sweeping dimensions. The integration of a wider variety of peoples, including people in political power, implied more administrative problems, and the challenge of revising Church doctrines. Augustine's writings on a variety of issues, including suicide in this particular case, were in all likelihood his answer to this challenge.

[64] The Donatists and Circumcellions did not attribute importance to how they died or to who killed them; rather their purpose was to surrender themselves completely and unconditionally to the glory of true faith and find everlasting bliss. Alvarez gives a detailed, and somewhat chilling account of how members of these sects proceeded to provoke 'volunteers' to render their release from a life of torment (59-64). In order to hasten an afterlife that promised greater rewards many were known to fling themselves off cliffs in great numbers, so it would seem plausible then to assume that if they were faced with an illness, as little threatening as imagined, they would not hesitate to resort to suicide.

[65] See J. Haldane, "Voluntarism and Realism in Medieval Ethics," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 15 (1989): 39-44. Haldane speculates that the Church also had financial interests in bringing an end to these erratic suicides as it was faced with the loss of so many of its members, and rapidly shrinking collection plates.

philosophically, but Augustine, who validly took for granted that everyone else had knowledge of their stories, fiercely and unequivocally condemned these two suicides. His pioneer approach was to tackle the problem on biblical grounds, arguing that the prohibition of suicide was a natural extension of the sixth commandment – "Thou shalt not kill." A suicide would be breaking one of God's Ten Commandments, so even if he wished to make amends for his sins, he would in fact be infringing upon the State and Church's authority. Curiously, despite leaning heavily on the Bible for his criticism of suicide, Augustine's writings are also reminiscent of non-Christian philosophical sources. [66]

Augustine also drew readily on Pythagoras and Plato's doctrine that life is God-given and that a man's suffering is already predestined. Therefore, under no circumstance may life be cut short by his own hand. Were he to commit suicide in order to stave off sin or ease suffering of any kind, then the blood of an innocent man would be on his hands, and how can a dead man repent of his sins? Just how patiently a man bore his suffering was God's way of gauging the grandeur of a man's soul, but if a man resorted to suicide then it meant only one thing: he spurned God's will.

Augustine's vindications against suicide were set down in many of his writings, but it is in *The City of God* (written some time between 413-427ACE)

[66] Once more, it is possible to discern just how influential different intellectual tendencies were on one another. Despite Augustine's Christian faith, he was well versed in the ancient (and supposedly pagan) philosophies. The suicides of Lucretia and Cato had long stood in the highest of respect as exemplary and exceptional martyrs of moral and political principle. Lucretia's act represented chastity, a virtue on which, until then, a high value had been set. Cato's represented freedom. Were these ideals in any way challenged or threatened, then suicide was the only morally honourable and virtuous way out. Although an almost mythical aura had enveloped their suicides permitting an easy entry into moral awareness, over time they were to dwindle eventually in popularity. These legends, along with Stoic philosophy and other ancient Greek and Roman texts from antiquity, were to enjoy a vigorous revival at the time of the Renaissance. Indeed, in years to come, they would continue to spur literary thought. For instance, Shakespeare's poem "The Rape of Lucrece" (1594) is a highly rhetorical expansion of the story as told by the Roman historian Livy (Titus Livius) in *c.*59BCE-*c.*17ACE.

where he is most severely critical.[67] In sharp opposition to an easy death, life and suffering were sanctified. Endurance was extolled as a virtue. Augustine was the first writer to challenge the very thorny issue of the sainthood of the suicidal virgins, yet again, on the grounds that it vilely and wickedly opposed the Sixth Commandment – that of murder. The fact that Augustine was able, from such meagre pickings in the Bible, to come up with, and on occasion improvise, so many arguments against suicide can only be, quite simply, a sign of sheer genius. I feel a particular ease in affirming this, for how else can one explain the fact that hundreds of years down the line he remains a name of reference, and his words are still articulated in so many scholarly circles: ecclesiastical, literary and philosophical, among others.

Finally, in the sixth century, the Church, whose views on suicide had been steadily changing, categorically and unconditionally prohibited it, declaring all suicides, regardless of reason or circumstance, sinful. Canon Law recognised without qualification the gravity of suicide in 563ACE. "The strictures against taking one's own life became fearsome," write Humphry and Wickett and add that, "to gain any kind of merciful release from an affliction, however grave, became unthinkable."[68] Christian burial was forbidden to those who killed themselves, and even attempted suicide became an ecclesiastical crime, punishable by excommunication. Ironically, Augustine's well-intentioned and humanitarian opposition to suicide eventually degenerated into "legalised and

[67] The four arguments that Augustine pointed out as the most fundamental to justify the Church's position in regards to suicide are as follows: "1) no private individual may assume the right to kill a guilty person; 2) the suicide who takes his own life has killed a man; 3) the truly noble soul will bear all suffering from which the effort to escape is an admission of weakness; and 4) the suicide dies the worst of sinners because he is not only running away from the fear of temptation but also any possibility of absolution." See Farberow 6-7.

[68] Derek Humphry and Ann Wickett, *The Right to Die: Understanding Euthanasia* (London: Harper, 1986) 6. Consider also Margaret Pabst Battin, *Ethical Issues in Suicide* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1982) 179-191. Battin argues that Christianity's prohibition of suicide in the fourth century was intended to prevent followers from killing themselves because of religious fanaticism. By no means was it designed to manage suicides due to physical or emotional suffering, old age, altruism toward others, and personal or societal honour. "While there was at that time a need to prevent the surfeit of martyrs' suicides, there was," she contends, "no intention to dispel the Platonic case for rational suicide". (190). She holds theologians and philosophers responsible for the misrepresentations.

sanctified atrocities, by which the body of the suicide was degraded, his memory defamed, his family persecuted."[69] Though he did not expressly use the word 'euthanasia' as we now know it, he *did* exclude terminal illness and suffering, physical and otherwise, as potential justification to end life.

Throughout the first blossoming of early western civilisation, the primitive terrors of suicide had been smothered. Suicide basked gloriously in Greek tolerance, was admired and thrived readily under Roman good sense and respectability, and had flung wide open the gateway to Zion for early Christian zealots. But now, the darkness was looming yet again as suicide was turned into a diabolical and mortal sin against God, and the gravest of crimes against society. A chapter came to a close.

1.3. The Start of a New Era – Euthanasia and Suicide in the Middle Ages

The Church's ultimate decisive weapon to restrain suicide was unequivocally the denial of Christian burial rites. The corpses of those who had dared to perform the deed were disposed of in a manner befitting of the 'diabolical' crime. And, although some of the methods of desecration of the corpse can be described as nothing less than bizarre and savage, they were to become firmly lodged in medieval customs.[70] More often than not the already lifeless body would be dragged through the streets and then buried at a crossroads, but not before a wooden stake had been driven through the heart. Another superstition that was held was that the suicide's body could not be removed via the door, but rather it had to be taken out through a window, or in the absence of one, through a hole, which would be made specifically for that end.

In the Middle Ages, the Church had little to do with the punishment of attempted suicide, which I have to admit rendered me somewhat puzzled, yet

[69] H. A. Mason, *Humanism and Poetry in the Early Tudor Period* (London: Routledge, 1959) 112.
[70] Farberow believes that such vicious attitudes were not absorbed by the Church and then passed on to its followers, but rather they were "morals that came from below – a transference of the popular pagan idea into the semi-Christianized world" (6).

nonetheless, evidence indicates just that. It seems the Church was fairly lenient and more often than not, it was the community, which mostly took on the acts of profanation to the body, and it was not a form of punishment imposed by the Church. Strictly speaking, the negation of religious ceremonies was the aspect on which Church authorities placed more emphasis. So for instance, a suicide would be denied burial on holy ground, and the priest would make no mention of his name during mass, let alone say a prayer for the salvation of his soul: it was damned already.[71] Yet, once more, there are always those who insist on straying from the path taken by the rest of the flock. For instance, I read accounts of local parish priests who did not adhere to such practices, and who in fact were 'rebellious' in their own way by allowing the exceptional burial of a suicide on holy ground.[72] The question arises. Why?

A possible answer might lie quite simply in the priest's role in the community. In the Middle Ages, physicians were hardly asked to visit the sick and elderly in the various hospitals created by the Church.[73] It was the priest who was at the helm of death and dying. The physician was not normally encumbered with such concerns, contrarily; he was advised not to care for the dying patients,

[71] The Catholic Church has endeavoured to keep up with changes in modern society, and at present the Vatican holds that: "We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives" (*Cathechism of the Catholic Church*, article 2283, available at www.vatican.va/). Added, almost as an aside, is the following article: "Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide" (*Cathechism of the Catholic Church*, article 2283). Although the Church's approach does seem more accommodating, it remains somewhat vague as far as burial rites are concerned. Perhaps, this explains sporadic cases of local parish priests who continue to refuse such rites to suicides.

[72] See John Wilkinson, *Christian Ethics in Health Care* (Edinburgh: Handel P, 1988) 301-305.

[73] In 1106, the Priory, which nowadays is a private hospital in London for the rehabilitation of drug addicts and alcoholics, was founded and run by priests. The Church was also responsible for setting up St Bartholomew's Hospital (1123) and Bethlem Hospital (1377). However, by the late Middle Ages, abuses within the medical profession had grown out of hand and measures were called for. Henry VIII, on the advice of his court physician Thomas Linacre, founded the Royal College of Physicians in London to control who practised as a physician in London and so protect the public from quacks. Linacre (1460-1524), one of the foremost humanist scholars in England, was an intimate friend of Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus. This is relevant in that it further exemplifies the extent of More's knowledge on a variety of subjects. This is a point that I shall develop further in the following chapter.

for the death of patients only brought discredit on the physician who had been unable to save them from death. Whilst, on the whole, thinkers in the ancient world seemed to have favoured euthanasia, suicide of the terminally ill and dying is unusual in the west after about the second century, which is attributed to the change in philosophy and sacredness of life in Judaeo-Christian teachings. However, and I am merely speculating, while it is highly unlikely that a priest would actively and consciously participate in euthanasia, by the same token it is highly unlikely that a priest would be unsympathetic to another's suffering. If a patient were no longer able to handle the anguish of unrelenting pain, then the possibility of an easy exit would in all likelihood not be too far back in the patient's mind. And given the highly emotional circumstances (and once again I reiterate that this is mere speculation on my part), just how judgemental would his priest, who is also his carer and confidant, actually be? Certainly, whether or not either of the parties toyed with the idea, neither would, in all likelihood, carry it out nor advocate it.

Another curious detail, which has contributed to this momentary (and quite possibly hazardous) wandering of my mind, is that the Church itself, until the very late Middle Ages at least, reveals a disparity in attitudes. In spite of standing unwaveringly firm in its conviction that suicide was a heinous crime against nature and God, the Church seldom punished the *attempted* suicide. "When it did," writes Murray, "its punishments were egregiously mild and of a conspicuously penitential character. Indeed the Church's reaction to attempt can amount to no punishment at all."[74] He goes on to argue that in fact great efforts were made to provide care to the person who made the attempt.

The law's answer to attempted suicide remained hazy and dichotomous, the judge being free to choose the form of punishment that best suited the crime. Based on principles of Roman law if the suicide hinted at a confession to a crime then confiscation, usually of property, was the course to take. Indeed, the villain's

[74] Murray II 425.

guilt established, then the punishment was beyond reprehension. In contrast, anyone who had attempted to end his life, but was regarded as being respectable came in for the full benefit of the Stoic amnesty on suicide. On the issue of attempted suicide, the law remained on a seesaw. Perhaps, this is because there was a substantial amount of Roman law in canon law, and in most practical matters Stoicism and Christianity sat side-by-side.

Indeed, the apparent reluctance to shake off ancient philosophical doctrines or perhaps the sheer magnetism such doctrines exerted on intellectual minds, is evident yet again in one of the greatest of medieval Scholastic theologians. St Thomas Aquinas (*c.*1225-1274) was an Italian philosopher and Dominican friar whose writings represent the culmination of Scholastic philosophy, the harmony of faith and reason and the reconciliation of Christian theology with Aristotelian philosophy. His *Summa Theologica* welds the moral and political sciences together within a theological and metaphysical framework. Aquinas not only builds on the principles that formed the bedrock of Christian arguments against suicide, namely those in the Bible and in Augustine's works, but his writings also reveal close reading of Aristotle's texts. For instance, Aquinas raises the same issues on suicide as Augustine by stating that suicide is a kind of homicide, and he gives Aristotle's *Polis* prominence in its social embodiment as *Communitas.* To commit suicide is to sin against nature and against charity. It is to sin against God because life is a gift and subject only to God's powers. It is to sin against society as a whole. Since every man is a part of the community, what happens to him inevitably has to affect the community – thus, it is plain to see why the argument that suicide is potentially harmful to the community is given a position of weight in European laws against suicide.

And just as others before had roused Aquinas intellectually, he too is a very important influence on Dante (1265-1321), the great Italian poet. The philosophical framework of Dante's *Divina Commedia,* comprising of the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso,* is based on Aquinas' work. The *Inferno* is a very forbidding description of Hell, conceived as a graduated conical funnel, to the

successive circles of which the various categories of sinners are assigned. It is in the seventh and lowest circle, beneath the burning heretics and the murderers that a sinister tangled wood stands, and it is where the souls of suicides twist and writhe in the form of disfigured poisonous thorns. Hideous-looking creatures are constantly pecking at them, which only adds further to the woeful cries of suffering and misery that engulf the wood. Such is the end that awaits a soul, which has been savagely ripped from its own body. When Judgement Day finally dawns, these souls will not join with their bodies, thereby consecrating their union with eternal despair and torment.

However, besides painting quite a dark and grim picture of a suicide's ultimate fate, Dante also leaves that ever-so-slight impression that he sympathises with their plight. I do not wish to be misunderstood here, but in saying this, I mean that he sounds as if their distress is not unfamiliar to him. Yet, there are ample signs that he categorically spurns suicide. This strange fluctuation of emotions is almost as if his artistic-self were playing at tug-of-war with his Christian-self, each pulling in opposite directions. This conflict of emotions may be thus described:

> Although the tone and reverberations of the poetry in no way condone the sin, they render it at least understandable, and they link it implicitly with a more qualified despair which Dante himself seems to have know. Meanwhile, the orthodox believer rejects the act flatly and in horror … In the end, a mortal sin is a mortal sin. What the Church condemns, no poetry can exonerate.[75]

[75] Alvarez 128. Interestingly, Dante ends the canto with a line that suggests that he feels no sympathy; that the suicide's punishment is more than befitting of the crime. The Christian in Dante speaks more loudly. Later, I shall call on Dante once again when discussing Thomas More's 'sympathetic' reference to euthanasia, and I hope to draw a parallel between the two thinkers. Dante's reputation rose in the nineteenth century with the admiration of Byron, Shelley, Carlyle, and others, fitting in with the literary mood at that time. In the twentieth century he profoundly influenced T. S. Eliot; his essay *Dante* (1929) and the many references and quotations in his poetry brought Dante to the attention of a new readership.

Although Dante might hot have challenged the orthodoxy of the Church's judgement of suicide as being a heinous crime, the fact remains that the act of suicide clearly exerted tremendous influence over the creative imagination. In short, over a period of twelve centuries, suicide had become the most mortal of Christian sins.

1.4. Euthanasia and Suicide from the Renaissance to the Age of Reason

As Europe began to clean house to bid a new era welcome, the dust that had long been gathering on the sill of intellectualism was unsettled, allowing once more light to filter into the mind of Renaissance man. And, as light often does, it also laid bare new paths to be explored. The stark contrast with the sombre and inflexible framework of the Middle Ages steered man in a new direction, to question and challenge what had until then been taken for granted. It was the renewed interest in the numerous texts of classical antiquity, which acted as a catalyst to this change in the intellectual *modus operandi*. This revival of learning allowed for the resurrection of old philosophical issues and religious concerns; of which death was naturally a part.

During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church had awarded much prominence to the figure of Death which was portrayed as unspeakably horrible, merciless and savage.[76] The Grim Reaper's scythe cut evenly across, irrespective of social office or wealth. It was only inevitable, therefore, that the Renaissance man's inherited miserable and melancholic fixation with death was to increase. On the whole, thinkers continued to endorse the Church's strong condemnation of

[76] The Dance of Death, or otherwise known as the *Danse Macabre*, gave expression to the sense especially prominent in the fifteenth century (perhaps as a consequence of the plague and the preaching of the mendicant friars) of the ubiquity of Death the leveller. The Dance appears to have first taken shape in France, as a mimed sermon in which figures typical of various orders of society were seized and haled away each by its own corpse. The earliest known painting of the Dance, accompanied by versified dialogues between living and dead, was made in 1424 in the cemetery of the Innocents in Paris, and the German artists (including Holbein) who later depicted it appear to have drawn inspiration from French sources. Scenes illustrated with Death as a skeleton appeared carved on church doors, altars and woodcuts, practically any and everywhere.

suicide, and they did not show sympathy to the permissive attitudes toward suicide and euthanasia generally held amongst the ancient pagans.

That the rediscovery of the classics acted as one of the spurs for the Renaissance is manifest, but I believe that there was also a stronger and far deeper impulse that came from within the creative mind. Metaphorically speaking, I could compare the mood to that of someone like Rip Van Winkle who wakes up from a long-drawn-out slumber to find that the world has undergone such staggering changes, and excitedly, yet semi-numb, struggles to discover his new place. Similarly, these Renaissance thinkers began to look at the world and society around them and to contemplate their individual purpose therein. Once someone sets out to tell that hardy tale, it seems only natural that questions shall be asked. Sometimes, bold questions require yet bolder answers. The protagonists in this tale are indeed numerous, as is the contribution of each to varying degrees inestimable, but unfortunately, I will not be able to mention them all or go into too much detail due to constraints. Nevertheless, it is precisely the boldness in literary creativity that makes this era so remarkably stimulating, and I will try to address this remodelling of individual self-consciousness in respect to the suicide and euthanasia debates.

The foundations upon which the Catholic Church's doctrines rested shuddered at the arousal of further religious fervour defiantly directed particularly at those who held the highest positions within the Catholic Church. However, neither the ideas of Martin Luther (1483-1546), nor Calvin (1509-1564), which brought about a clear shift from absolutism and compliance to individual enquiry and a sense of personal responsibility, altered in regards to suicide, for they condemned suicide as roundly as did the established Church. They stood fast in the belief that provided there was the opportunity for repentance, then, the almighty Redeemer could be merciful. It was during this period among England's Protestants, particularly the Puritans, that keen interest in moral issues regarding suicide began to flourish.

Fundamentally, the revitalisation of ancient philosophical thought fuelled an intellectual wildfire which swept indiscriminately across different cultures and religions. Two of the most devout Catholics of their time, and contemporaries with Luther and Calvin, partook in this academic mood. Desiderius Erasmus (*c.*1467-1536), the humanist scholar from Holland, and the English humanist Thomas More (1477-1535) marked the transition between the old world of the Middle Ages and the new of the Renaissance. Not only did they share a passion for classical learning that lay at the heart of the humanist movement, but also a keen Christian devotion, "a suspicion of scholastic hair-splitting, a delight in rhetoric … and a lively interest in experimental, unsettling wit."[77]

Erasmus wrote *Praise of Folly* in 1511, a satire especially directed against theologians and Church dignitaries. "He defended suicide which was committed to escape an unendurable life," writes Surte, "the death of a patient who was suffering extreme pain and had an incurable terminal illness was made easy … the death-dealing drug could be mandragora, or hemlock drunk by Socrates."[78]

In England, Thomas More writes *Utopia* (published in 1516) and, like Plato, he sanctions suicide as being a sort of voluntary euthanasia. On the imaginary island of Utopia, it is recommended for the terminally ill: "this would be a wise act … since for him death puts an end, not to pleasure, but to agony."[79] The ecclesiastical powers grant the necessary authorisation for euthanasia in cases where "life is simply torture and the world a mere prison cell."[80] However, although More was intensely passionate for the ancient world in which suicide was regarded by some as an honourable way out of profound personal and political difficulties, he was vehemently against it:

[77] M. H. Abrams, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (New York: Norton, 2000) 504.
[78] Edward Surte, and J. H. Hexter, eds., *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1965) 477.
[79] Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1992) 60.
[80] More, *Utopia* 60.

> But the suicide, who takes his own life without the approval of priests and senate, they consider unworthy either of earth or fire, and throw his body, unburied and disgraced, into the nearest bog.[81]

Neither suicide nor euthanasia was acceptable in Catholic Christianity, and the ardent Catholic in More expressed his disapproval in many of his personal letters and other writings. It is most profusely documented in *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* written in 1534.

Whether or not More and Erasmus approved of euthanasia, or of the ideals that lay behind the act itself is not of utmost importance at this point because, in a later chapter, I shall be examining in far greater detail the contribution of their writings to the euthanasia and suicide debates, as well as their influence not only on each other but also on many future generations. Essentially, what I would like to draw out at this time is that the literary works of these two masters are audacious intellectual games that call into question the period's most treasured beliefs. "It is as though the rediscovery of the classics," comments Alvarez, "had returned each man's death into his own gift."[82] And, many more were to follow suit.

Of the distinguishing marks that cut across the Renaissance was the resuscitated interest in individual liberty, the liberty to question. It produced a shift, which allowed the morality of life-and-death decisions to be more flexible and heterogeneous. Indeed, they were subject to speculation. In his *Essais*, Montaigne (1533-1592), French moralist and essayist, narrates various anecdotes of individuals who take their own lives. He sprinkles these anecdotes generously with quotations from Romans who wrote in praise of suicide, which is fairly easy to discern as most of his writings are peppered with Stoic ideas. And, it is of tremendous significance that Montaigne does not cite as freely from the Church's

[81] More, *Utopia* 60.
[82] Alvarez 131.

established and influential authority but rather he cites more readily from the classics, and in particular from Seneca.

While Montaigne's general scepticism prevents him from staking out a firm moral position on suicide, he gives only a nod to the orthodox Christian position and conceptualises the issue not in traditional theological terms but as a matter of personal judgement or conscience. He goes boldly further in reasoning that a man's sense of self-respect and capacity to pinpoint his position in nature's hierarchical structure makes suicide acceptable. "It was no disadvantage, in his [Montaigne's] eyes," says Humphry, "if humanistic reflections of the period provided an opportunity to cast doubts on the teachings of the Church."[83] The exact antithesis is, in fact, the case. There are those scholars who hold that his influence actually caused the strong feeling of suicide-horror to dwindle, for Montaigne describes death not as a bottomless pit of dread, but rather as a sanctuary. Farberow states that in France, due to Montaigne's writings, "the absolute condemnation of suicide disappeared from the enlightened classes, although not from among the common people."[84]

The beginning of the seventeenth century saw the awakening of questioning minds which challenged the acquisition of knowledge; knowledge that, which had until then been "acquired by a systematic acquaintance with the assertions of authority from Aristotle down through his scholastic interpreters, and general truths, made evident by the controlling fictions of art and literature."[85]

The right to euthanasia was another concern to be addressed, and Francis Bacon (1561-1626) came out in the defence of euthanasia both in *New Atlantis* and *The Advancement of Learning*, in which he wrote:

[83] Humphry 7-8.
[84] Farberow 8. Montaigne exerted considerable influence on European thought and literature: Descartes, Bacon, Browne, Swift, Peacock and Shakespeare.
[85] John Hollander, and Frank Kermode, *The Literature of Renaissance England*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973) 934.

> I esteem it the office of the physician not only to restore health, but to mitigate pains and dolours; and not only when such mitigation may conduce to recovery, but when it may serve to make a fair and easy passage."[86]

The doctrines of the ancient masters of intellectualism, indelibly the fathers of western thought, left such deep marks that their influence remains starkly evident many hundreds of years later. On page 6 of this study I mentioned that Plato criticised the meddling physician for misuse of his skills. This faint echo of ancient thought can still be heard in Bacon's writings. On this matter of the physician's role Bacon goes further, that physicians "ought both to acquire the skill and to bestow the attention whereby the dying may pass more easily and quietly out of life."[87]

Upon closer examination, Bacon himself does not appear to make any distinctions between death from natural causes and death by suicide. In his perspective, perhaps more scientifically orientated, a dead body was a dead body, and what counted was the dignity and the gracefulness in the act of dying. Indeed, interest in life-and-death issues sprouted in practically all spheres of intellectual study: science, philosophy, art and literature, amongst others. And, while men like Bacon took a more down-to-earth and scientific approach, his

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[86] Francis Bacon, *Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning, Book IV*, eds., James Spedding, Robert Ellis, and Douglas Heath (London: Longman, 1986) 387. Indeed, this is quite extraordinary, for is this idea not reminiscent of earlier texts? At first glance, it seems pretty straightforward: the physician's duty is to ensure "a fair and easy passage". However, and perhaps given the dimensions of the euthanasia debate, it is only inevitable that questions follow. Certainly, one that scholars continue to grapple with is what is meant by "a fair and easy passage"? I must insist yet again upon the need to recall that the term 'euthanasia' did not have the same significance it has today. At present, euthanasia is the practice of mercifully ending a person's life in order to release the person from an incurable disease, intolerable suffering or undignified death. As would be expected, there are many different medical conditions, which require different approaches, and so categories have been devised so as to accommodate as many as possible. For instance, voluntary-active euthanasia involves painlessly putting individuals to death for merciful reasons, as when a physician administers a lethal dose of medication to a patient. In the case of physician-assisted suicide, the person who wishes to die administers the lethal treatment himself. Passive euthanasia involves not doing something to prevent death, as when physicians refrain from using an artificial respirator to keep a terminally ill patient alive. To most activists either pro- or anti-euthanasia, the difference between euthanasia and suicide is simply a question of semantics, and indeed they are two peas in a pod.

[87] Francis Bacon, *Book IV* 387.

contemporary Shakespeare (1564-1616), himself always theatrically pragmatic, portrayed suicides in his plays without condemning them.[88]

This apparent impartiality is noticeable in three of Shakespeare's more celebrated tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the priest tells of the double suicide without any undertone of reproach, and *Othello*, in which Cassio, an exemplary Venetian Catholic, regards Othello's suicide as an indication of his nobility: "For he was great of heart."[89] Interestingly, it is also in *Hamlet* that Ophelia's suicide is liable to religious condemnation, but by the same token the priest who refuses to grant her her last burial rites is vehemently criticised by Laertes:

> FIRST CLOWN. Is she to be buried in Christian burial when
> she wilfully seeks her own salvation?
>
> ……
>
> LAERTES. Lay her i'th'earth,
> And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
> May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest,
> A minist'ring angel shall my sister be,
> When thou liest howling.[90]

It would not, in all likelihood, be easy to arrive at any sudden or profound explanation in regards to Shakespeare's position towards the moral dilemma of

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[88] The suicides in Shakespeare's plays are as follows: Romeo and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*; Cassius, Brutus and Portia in *Julius Caesar*; Othello in *Othello*; Ophelia in *Hamlet* who is said to have drowned in suspicious circumstances; Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*; and finally in *Anthony and Cleopatra* where suicide occurs an astounding five times Mark Anthony, Cleopatra, Charmain, Iras and Eros. John Wilkinson writes that: "There are several references in the plays of … physicians 'giving over' patients when they were dying which presumably means that they no longer attended them, although they may send them opiates to relieve their pain" (307). Perhaps, this kind of situation emerged because a physician was constantly concerned about his reputation. The playwright John Webster (*c.*1578-*c.*1632), a younger contemporary of Shakespeare, in fact makes reference to this through the words of one of the characters in *The White Devil.*

[89] William Shakespeare, *Othello,* ed. Stanley Wells *et al.*, *William Shakespeare. The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2005) 907.

[90] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Stanley Wells *et al.*, *William Shakespeare. The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2005) 710-712.

suicide, although it would clearly make for interesting discussion. Suffice it to say that for present purposes, Shakespeare did not allow his own religious inclinations to undermine his natural impulse for practical dramatic productiveness. Besides which, interest in tragedy does not suggest that there was a sudden acceptance of suicide. For in fact, suicide in the real Renaissance world did not quite correspond to suicide on the Renaissance stage. While the wonderfully lyrical words expressed on stage by a distressed tragic hero certainly heightened the drama, it did nothing to taper the gap between both worlds. I believe that it would not be far-fetched to say that in Shakespeare's time it was more than likely that the body of a suicide would be dragged through the streets and buried somewhere, possibly at a crossroads, with a stake driven through the heart, as mentioned above. But the hint of self-dramatisation enveloping the very act of suicide made it appealing and certainly useful for Shakespeare.

To reiterate then a previous observation, the characteristic feature which set Renaissance attitude to suicide apart from that of the Middle Ages was not the renewed interest in ancient thought inasmuch as it was the resuscitation of individualism, the openness to question. This flood of intellectual light allowed thinkers to edge forward a bit more boldly along the path of knowledge to seek more answers to complex questions.

It is actually ironic that such curiosity seems to have come from those one would least expect, and certainly John Donne (1572-1631) fits the bill. Born into a devout Catholic family, Donne, who apparently denounced his faith in his early twenties, wrote *Biathanatos*, a defence of suicide, sometime around 1607. It remained unpublished until after his death, and it continues to be regarded by many scholars as being the first comprehensive contemporary defence of suicide. *Biathanatos* draws on a selection of classical and modern legal and theological sources to dispute that Christian doctrine should not sustain that suicide is unavoidably a wicked and unpardonable sin. His analysis is essentially internal because he applies the logic of Christian thought to demonstrate that suicide is not adverse to the laws of nature, of reason, or of God. If it were adverse to the law of

nature, which commands self-preservation, then, by the same token, all acts of self-denial or suffering would be similarly unlawful. Furthermore, circumstances may arise in which reason might advocate suicide, such as the unbearable pain brought about by a terminal illness. Upon further reflection, Donne observes that Biblical Scriptures are not only deficient in a distinctly severe condemnation of suicide, but that Christian doctrine has also made allowances for other forms of killings, for instance, capital punishment, martyrdom and killing in times of war.

For a while, it was fashionable among academics to account for Donne's defence of suicide as his opportunity to blow his own intellectual trumpet. In truth, *Biathanatos* is a display of wit and learning, although there are academics that regard it as overly detailed, prone to hair-splitting and stiflingly scholarly. In a word, it is as unyieldingly supported as it is challenged. Despite this, consensus is usually reached in what concerns Donne's melancholic, depressed and death-obsessed character.[91] He had written about suicide because he was himself continuously tempted to it. And, it is a temptation he readily owns up to.

I am especially fascinated by the more internalised attitude Donne takes to suicide as opposed to the more straightforward Stoic attitude of his contemporaries. For the Stoic, rational thought lay at the core of any decision to commit suicide, whereas for Donne it was more a question of a ubiquitous mood. It has been suggested that perhaps the poet started out writing *Biathanatos* as a kind of therapy for the soul; in other words, to find instances in which he could, as a Christian, commit suicide without being castigated for all eternity. I am inclined to agree with Alvarez when he states that: "the process of writing the book and marshalling his [Donne's] intricate learning and dialectical skill may have relieved the tension and helped to re-establish his sense of his self."[92] This seems reasonable enough; for writing is often used as a therapeutic vehicle to ease the heavy load of the heart and mind.

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[91] Donne, who suffered poor health his whole life, had his portrait drawn wearing his shroud and standing on a funeral urn, just as he imagined he would appear when rising from the grave at the Last Judgement, and it remains one of the signs of his sustained obsession with death.
[92] Alvarez 139.

While *Biathanatos* rattled traditional values and arguments against suicide, it also had the added effect of being regarded by many of Donne's contemporaries as quite simply another declaration of melancholy, the fashionable malady of the day. In Elizabethan and Stuart England, melancholy became a popular state and generally accepted as being a feature of superior intellects. Robert Burton (1577-1640), author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, is less classical and more clear-cut in his analysis of suicide: if life becomes unbearable, because of, for instance, the onset of an incurable illness, then suicide is more than justified.[93]

Donne and Burton went out on a limb in the defence of their views, but both had to pull back because they found themselves standing indecisively at a crossroads leading either down an academic path or down a religious one. Perhaps, the simple fact that ill health tormented them daily encouraged them to embrace the idea of suicide more readily, or perhaps, they were merely hankering after intellectual recognition, or perhaps they were swept up in the 'melancholic' mood of their day. Whatever, the reasons for their interest in suicide, their contributions added a new element to an issue, which was supposedly more than settled. The intellectual monster of life-and-death issues was beginning to stir once again. And, once more, the manner of a man's death became a literary subject.

Nonetheless, despite what might even be regarded as, in layman's terms, a gutsy confrontation against traditional Christian thought at that time, conservative religious doctrines continued to abound well into the late seventeenth century, where even an otherwise liberal thinker like John Locke (1632-1704), perhaps the most famous of all English philosophers, echoed earlier arguments of the scholastic philosopher Thomas Aquinas. Locke maintained that God bestowed upon man a natural personal liberty but that that liberty did not include the liberty to destroy himself. According to Locke, even though the laws of nature are meant to guide us to individual as well as to common well being, and even though we

[93] Victorian thinkers would pick up on this 'melancholic' mood, and hence, their attitude to suicide, particularly if suffering intolerable pain or if afflicted by some terminal illness.

are competent to set up our own political order, we are still to be viewed, as needing to have morality imposed upon us. Most people need to be taught and ordered how to behave in a moral way. Consequently, to get the majority to behave decently the threat of punishment is called for.[94] Locke's state of nature is one governed by the laws of God, and like the Greek philosophers, in particular the Stoics, Locke recognised the possibility that actual human laws might be unjust. He claimed that some of our rights are inalienable; therefore, there are moral limits to what the government may do.

Locke's philosophical doctrines continue to have much relevance to the present day euthanasia debate. For, although he did not attribute any rights to suicide, irrespective of circumstance, there are modern day thinkers who have drawn generously upon his philosophical theories in support of voluntary euthanasia. And, they are inclined to push his inalienability of rights to the very edge, in that a man who finds himself terminally ill and in great pain has the right to make certain choices about his demise; thus, an individual should be free, for instance, to choose whether or not to discontinue life-prolonging medical treatment. Peter Singer maintains that: "when and how we die is primarily our own concern, and that, especially … when we are terminally or incurably ill, we have the right to choose the time and manner of our death."[95]

Firstly, I acknowledge that Locke was by no means addressing the issue of euthanasia, and secondly, I acknowledge that regardless of circumstance, he did not condone suicide. But, given that many people still consider him to be intellectually advanced for his age, and somewhat controversial at that, I cannot

[94] This is certainly true for the early Christian Church when martyrdom-hungry-religious fanatics were hankering after suicide. For, the Church was indeed compelled to address this problem urgently, and seek within its own doctrines possible and convincing interpretations that suicide, under any circumstances, went against the laws of nature and God. The fact that popular superstition had suicide in such low regard was a bonus, so all that the Church needed to do was to rekindle a fear that already existed, and add to it the threat of punishment. It was punishment that came from the highest authority, God himself. And, if a man suffered pain, it was God's will, and therefore, incontestable.

[95] Peter Singer, "Freedom and the Right to Die," *Free Inquiry* 15 May 2002: vol. 22, no. 2, , 9 June 2005, http://www.utilitarian.net/singer. Singer is a Princeton bio-ethicist and a leader of the right-to-die movement.

help but wonder on which side of the euthanasia fence he would choose to stand today. Assuredly, Locke's philosophical outlooks are far more profound and intricate than the dozen or so lines that I have clumsily thrown together here, but what I have endeavoured to do is to draw attention to the idea that laws of men vary from place to place, and from age to age. Brenda Almond writes that:

> … such existing laws – laws of convention – might be contrasted with a natural law which was not variable or relative in this way, a law to which everyone had access through the individual conscience, and a law by which actual laws in particular times and places might be judged and sometimes found wanting.[96]

Thus, it would follow then that if the laws of men may vary, then by the same token so do ideals vary from individual to individual and from age to age.

And so it was that the fashionable state of melancholy carried over from the seventeenth century into the eighteenth century in a more moderate guise, and the previous mood of doom and gloom found a new direction in the bitterness and cantankerousness of the great age of satire. The intellectual monster of life-and-death issues, which had begun to stir earlier, found itself now facing feistier and more irreverent opponents, the likes of: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Hume.[97] For these eighteenth century rationalists, it was preposterous and pure conjecture to regard suicide as an outrageous and intolerable crime. In France,

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[96] Brenda Almond, "Rights," *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 259. For further discussion on Locke's philosophical views see J. B. Schneewind, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 147-157, and Brenda Almond, "Rights," in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 259-269. Also of interest is Gordon Graham, *Eight Theories of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 162-175.

[97] By the late seventeenth century, suicide was being more freely tolerated by the educated sector of society, but among the lower classes the influence of the Church, steadfast in its convictions, prevailed. The Church remained sufficiently powerful to produce reactionary secular legislation in 1670, at which time suicide became not only murder but also high treason and heresy. Most eighteenth century opposition arose in France where strong currents of liberalism flowed. Montesquieu spoke of suicide from the perspective of a survivor, Rousseau (whose work was included into the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*) chose a more romanticised course, and Voltaire brought the perspective of reason. By 1870, almost a century later, the French government finally removed all vestiges of discrimination against anyone who committed suicide, particularly in regards to religious or civil burials.

opposition began to surge gradually against the many prejudices and penalties, which loomed over this private and solemn act. It was thought that when a man was overcome by incurable pain, or when he no longer felt able to function completely as a man, then, death was incontestably a merciful release and suicide a praiseworthy act.

David Hume's (1711-1776) *Essay on Suicide* arguably marks the transition for the English who were a lot slower on the uptake of this tolerant mood in the matters of suicide and euthanasia. As Alvarez informs us, the eighteenth-century rationalists considered it: "both absurd and presumptuous to inflate a trivial act into a monstrous crime … to Hume, the life of a man was of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster."[98] Many scholars regard his *Essay on Suicide* as an outstanding display of the fury that many of the intellectual men of Hume's time felt in regards to the cowardly and outdated superstitions. Certainly, not many of his contemporaries stuck out their necks as far as he did but it could also be argued that by that time a shift in morality was already under way and suicide had been taken from the realm of taboo and placed in a new one of manners.[99]

Thinkers and philosophers, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had begun to distance themselves from the belief that morality requires a religious foundation. Whilst most remained theists, and God still occupied a privileged position in their understanding of the universe, they did not believe that right and wrong involved following God's commandments; they did not fall back on the Church as a primary source of moral guidance. Rather, individual conscience and human reason were held as the fountains from which moral insight sprang. This did not mean, however, that these intellectual minds disowned all traditional moral values. For, while they were revolutionary in their ideas

[98] Alvarez 147. Curiously, Hume's criticism of the moral prejudice against suicide was published a year after he died, although it had been written twenty years before. It had been duly suppressed.
[99] In aristocratic circles, suicides gave a bountiful supply of gossip. Still, there were those who spoke out against such liberal views remaining faithful to the belief that suffering makes a man a better person and that to commit suicide is to go against nature and God.

concerning the sources of morality, frequently, they were not as radical in their own personal moral opinions.[100] It is one thing, however, for a philosopher to claim that morality is divorced from religion, or that the foundation of morality is not necessarily religious, but it is quite a different matter for those ideas to affect popular thinking. And, although there was a growth in the secularisation of philosophical thought throughout this period, in the popular mind, ethics remained decidedly coupled with religion. The moral duties of a man were regarded as an extension of his religious beliefs, and his moral life was believed to be the service of God.

1.5. Euthanasia and Suicide from the Romantic Period to Modern Times

The nineteenth century ushered in a new philosophical movement which came to seize philosophers' imaginations and reshape popular thinking: Utilitarianism. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) maintained that the purpose of morality is not the service of God or obedience to abstract moral rules, but rather it is to foster as much happiness as humanly possible for all people on earth. He went further still declaring that, in order to maximise happiness, the law should not look to enforce abstract moral rules or meddle in the private affairs of citizens, and that under no circumstances does the law have any right to interfere in whatsoever consenting adults do in private. For, the law should concern itself with people's behaviour only when they may bring harm upon others.

For the utilitarian, the implications brought about by the euthanasia debate were evident. Did a swift painless death for those suffering a terminal illness increase or decrease human happiness? Bentham argued that the only outcome of such acts would be a decrease in the amount of unhappiness in the world, and concluded that euthanasia must, therefore, be morally right. Indeed, John Stuart

[100] For instance, the German philosophers Kant (1724-1804) and Hegel (1770-1831) expounded that moral truths are known through the use of reason alone. However, when they exercised their reason on such matters as suicide and euthanasia, they were inclined to follow and approve of the Church's doctrines.

Mill (1806-1873) would show support for this doctrine when he argued that the individual is sovereign over his own body and mind, and, where an individual's own interests are involved, there is no other authority. Bentham reasoned that pain and pleasure are the supreme rulers over a man's behaviour and that they alone can point out what we ought to do. Thus, it would follow then that if a man wishes to end his life, rather than cling to a life of insufferable pain with no promise of improvement, then the government has no right to interfere. In fact, I found it interesting to learn that Bentham himself requested euthanasia in his final days.

The nineteenth century opened the door to several other developments which also contributed to the shaping of modern thought on suicide and, by the same token, euthanasia. One of these developments was the appearance in literature of a romanticised 'script' for self-murder, according to which suicide was the unavoidable response of a misunderstood and anguished soul jilted by love or shunned by society. The social, religious and legal taboos that had for so long loomed over suicide were about to lose their power as the act of killing oneself metamorphosed into something positively desirable to the young Romantics all over Europe. Poetry and youth became synonymous. "It was a Romantic dogma," writes Alvarez, "that the intense, true life of feeling does not and cannot survive into middle-age."[101] To the eyes of the Romantics, destiny had laid only two possible paths before them: either they stifled their emotions and lived on to ripe old age or they yielded to the martyrdom of their passions, thereby snipping short their lifeline. Indeed, many of the Romantics subscribed to this belief and died at an early age by their own hands: Keats (1795-1821), Shelley (1792-1822) and Byron (1788-1824).

For the Romantics, life was led as if a tale was being told, and suicide became a literary act, a mad display of camaraderie with the imaginative hero that was in vogue at that time. Death and suicide were thus contemplated: "not as an end of everything but as the supreme, dramatic gesture of contempt towards a dull

[101] Alvarez 172.

bourgeois world."[102] And, although their concerns were not fully the same as those who advocated euthanasia, it allowed for many taboos surrounding the solemn act of death to vanish. It was not, however, only the Romantics who began to woo death at this time. Thinkers in all academic fields were speaking openly that provided a man acted rationally, he had the right to make decisions about his own life and death. It seemed therefore that yet again, ancient classical values were coming to the surface.

A further significant development was the fact that the medical profession surpassed the theological monopoly on death, and it is for this very reason that academics, in general, date the modern interest in the subject of euthanasia from the nineteenth century. Indeed, the first half of the century saw the improving sophistication in diagnosis and prognosis, as well as in the growing body of scientifically derived information on which these could be based. Only for those patients accurately diagnosed as incurable might active euthanasia, in the modern usage of the term, be proposed.[103]

In 1843, Karl Marx (1818-1883) delivered a pioneer lecture entitled "Medical Euthanasia", where he spoke disapprovingly of those physicians who turned their backs on patients for whom no cure could be found. He argued that a physician's duty was to use his skills to administer alleviation of pain where there was no longer any hope for cure. In recommending the use of various drugs like

[102] Alvarez 177.

[103] Until the mid-eighteenth century, there had been a superstitious separation of the critically ill from the dying, and to whom medical treatment could be provided or withheld. "The conscious dying person could even indicate when he wished to be lowered from the bed to the earth … and when the prayers were to start" (Westendorf 7). The physician was not expected to remain at the deathbed, but only when he had concluded that nothing more could be done. Furthermore, upon being requested by the conscious dying person, he could increase medication, which was known to hasten a swift and easy death. However, by the end of the century, a handful of medical professionals began to regard their responsibility to the patient in a new light. In 1794, the physician Paradys wrote an article, "Oratio de Euthanasia", recommending euthanasia as an easy death for a patient who had an incurable illness and was in great pain (See Wilson 26). Furthermore, at the start of the nineteenth century in most European countries, criminal and civil law had softened towards the suicide and his nearest of kin. Indignities to the corpse were officially abolished, as was the confiscation of a suicide's property.

sedatives, soporifics, antidepressants and antispasmodics on terminal patients, Marx was advocating what is known today as active euthanasia.[104]

His contemporary Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was the author of a philosophy, which although somewhat pessimistic, fit in quite neatly with Romantic views on suicide. He gave emphasis to individualism and human autonomy by stating that man has an undeniable claim to his own life and body and that, the moment the fears of life reach the point at which they outweigh the fears of death, a man is entitled to put an end to his life. Despite the probability that he might have been referring to general malaise as a springboard for the contemplation of self-inflicted death, it remained that a man had absolute right to exercise his will, whatever the reasons, over his own life and death.[105]

Scientific research in just about every medical field accompanied the interest in death, and, for instance, psychiatry was recognised as an autonomous discipline, pioneered by specialists capable of diagnosing and treating melancholy, hysteria and other ailments responsible for suicide.

It was mostly due to the work of sociologists, such as Durkheim and Laplace, that suicide was increasingly viewed as a social ill reflecting widespread alienation and other attitudinal by-products of modernity. In many European nations, the rise in suicide rates was thought to signal a culture decline. Suicide prevention became a bureaucratic and medical preoccupation, leading to a wave of institutionalisation for suicidal persons. These developments conspired to suggest that suicide is caused by impersonal social or psychological forces rather than by the agency of individuals. In 1897, Durkheim published *Le Suicide*, which examines suicide as a social fact and analyses it accordingly, somewhat demystifying the phenomenon.

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[104] In 1911, the Laforgues (Marx's daughter and her husband) committed suicide and left a written statement explaining their decision. They did not wish merciless old age to strip them of their intellectual strength or steal from them the pleasures of life thus transforming them into a burden unto themselves and society.

[105] See Henry Romilly Fedden, *Suicide: A Social and Historical Study* (London: Davies, 1938) 255-257.

In the final three decades of the nineteenth century, physicians and writers began increasingly to consider the concept of physical and mental pain as a possible justification for ending one's life.

In Britain, the first published article in which voluntary euthanasia was advocated appears to have been that written by Lionel A. Tollemache in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1873 with the intriguing title of "The New Cure for Incurables". It duly sparked off a lively discussion, which continued in the pages of the *Spectator* of the same year.[106] Clearly writing under the influence of Utilitarianism and Darwinism, Tollemache described the terminally ill and severely disabled as useless and burdensome to society. Although his views were, at the time, merely rejected as being too extremist, views, which were practically being cut from the same cloth, were surfacing because of the new science: eugenics.[107] In 1907, the English physician Goddard proposed a scheme for euthanasia as a way for terminally ill patients to avoid suffering. He included idiots, imbeciles and 'monstrosities', arguing that they had no will power or intelligence of their own, and thus were a burden on themselves, family and society.

Ian Dowbiggin argues that the drive to legalise mercy killing actually began in the late nineteenth century, a by-product of the popularisation of eugenics.[108] In fact, Charles Darwin (1809-1882) warned in *The Descent of Man* that hospitals, asylums, and therapeutic medicine interfered with natural selection

[106] Curiously, it was Samuel Williams, a schoolmaster, who wrote the first paper in 1870, dealing with the concept of 'medical' euthanasia. However, although the paper was reprinted many times, it was for some reason ignored by the British medical profession, but it was his arguments that Tollemache picked up on.

[107] The idea of sterilising the mentally ill, those with hereditary disorders and those with physical disabilities became increasingly fashionable. In 1889, the German philosopher Nietzsche (1844-1900) wrote an article in which he lamented the burden of the incurable on society. However, the most notorious and heinous case of involuntary euthanasia en-mass was yet to take place with the Nazi domination of Germany, as well as other countries.

[108] The prevailing conditions of the latter nineteenth century began to favour active euthanasia. Darwin's work, particularly his theories on evolution, challenged theology. For instance, many members of the clergy who opposed the use of anaesthesia in childbirth felt ridiculed when Queen Victoria herself chose this practice. It followed then that the removal of the dying process would become less of a hindrance. See Ian Dowbiggin, *A Merciful End: The Euthanasia Movement in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 63-69.

by permitting weak members of society to survive and reproduce (thereby implying euthanasia as a curative). It led his cousin Francis Galton to the idea that society could improve the gene pool by controlling human procreation.[109] This was to be accomplished both by encouraging 'good stock' to reproduce in larger numbers and to prevent 'bad stock' from procreating at all.

Now, it was a mere stone's throw away for these attitudes to go beyond deciding firstly, who should or should not be born, and secondly, who among those who were living, should or should not continue to do so. It was presumptuous that society ought to decide. Supporters of eugenics, to this day, hold that killing is not simply a rational means of bringing an end to suffering when life is no longer deemed worth living because of pain or despair, but it also has the potential to be an effective method of social control. In the early decades of the twentieth century eugenics and euthanasia became symbiotically linked. Certainly, many of the first activists regarded euthanasia as but one of the points on a broader agenda of affiliated causes that included (besides eugenics) population control, sexual equality and abortion.

These were issues Aldous Huxley consistently showed great interest in, and all have a firmly-rooted presence in his novel *Brave New World* (1932). Set in a future world state, social stability is based on a scientific caste system, where human beings are hatched from incubators and brought up by methodical conditioning to accept their social destiny, including being 'put to sleep' when they are no longer rendered useful to their social setting. Among Huxley's prophecies lies the belief that scientific and medical development is advancing at such an incredible pace that ethics is unable to keep up. Rather, it has fallen so far

[109] Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) was born in the aftermath of the Romantic agony in which genius and premature death were yoked together. He was the grandson of T. H. Huxley, who was not only a close friend to Darwin but was also an influential, though discriminating, supporter of his theories. And, although Huxley did not get to meet his grandfather in his lifetime, his legacy left, nonetheless, an indelible mark on his life: an influence that is reflected throughout in his academic work. Certainly, Huxley had a privileged position, for whilst a twentieth century man through and through (and considered by many academics far ahead of his own time), he was nurtured by the thrilling intellectual hub of the late nineteenth century.

behind, that society is battling to provide answers to difficult questions, which keep arising insistently in evermore-complex situations. Technological and scientific developments have made great inroads into medical treatment, thereby challenging beliefs and ideals which had until then been taken for certain; for instance, the possibility of prolonging life artificially as opposed to a natural death.

Society was challenged by a new dilemma, that of science *versus* ethics, which is in fact but one of the many issues that Huxley addresses in *Brave New World,* and which Brian Clark would address decades later in *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*. It is perhaps *the* dilemma lying at the core of the modern-day euthanasia debate.

Science lives by one generation contesting the hypotheses of the generation that came before it. Nonetheless, it might be argued that the difference between science and ethics remains manifest. For instance, not only did Einstein disagree with Newton: he disproved him. Science does not simply change: it *progresses.* Contrarily, in ethics and morality, although opinions change, they do not progress. "This is because," writes Graham, "there is no possibility of proof or disproof, just disagreement. Moral opinions cannot be conclusively proved or refuted."[110] Moreover, in regards to euthanasia, agreement is easily reached on matters of medical *science*, whereas on matters of medical *ethics* it is not. Indeed, the rapid growth in scientific knowledge has left a wake so wide that its repercussions will continue to be felt for years and years yet to come.

The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed an outpouring of scholarly articles and at least two books in support of euthanasia and its legalisation. In England, one of the most important steps was taken in 1931, when Dr C. Killick Millard delivered a speech entitled "A Plea for Legalisation of Euthanasia", in which he quoted at length from the apparent *apologia* in More's

[110] Graham 5. He goes further by saying: "here we encounter one of the reasons subjectivists tend to advance in favour of their view – that there is no such thing as moral proof" (Graham 6). This is certainly one of the dilemmas encountered by those arguing on either side of the euthanasia fence.

Utopia.[111] In an ensuing article in the *Fortnightly Review*, Millard put forward his proposals in a draft bill named "The Voluntary Euthanasia Legalisation Bill". There was a strong backlash, as would be expected for the time, but surprisingly, he received much support from prominent members of English society – academics, writers, physicians, clergy and members of the upper class. In 1936, after an impassioned debate in the House of Lords, the bill to legalise euthanasia was defeated by a vote of thirty-five to fourteen. [112]

There are perhaps three main forces, which induced such interest in the legalisation of euthanasia throughout the 1930s. The first lies in the fact that more and more physicians were willing to speak openly about the issue, and there were even cases of physicians who "admitted to putting suffering patients out of their misery."[113] Secondly, there was the ever-increasing number of court cases in both England and the United States revolving around mercy killings, assisted suicide and suicide because of terminal illnesses.[114] And thirdly, the overwhelming speed at which scientific development and medical technology was advancing.

Until the late 1930s, euthanasia had continued to grow in public popularity. As World War Two took shape, public opinion continued to show an increase in support for the legalisation of euthanasia and the leaders of this movement radiated confidence that legislative success was near-at-hand.

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[111] It is actually curious that although More's reference to euthanasia is in fact miniscule in comparison to other issues in *Utopia*, and although scholars overall agree he was in no way advocating the act, it has not deterred defenders of euthanasia throughout the ages from invoking his name and his words frequently to justify the act.

[112] The first organisations to promote the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia in the United States and Great Britain formed in the 1930s. The British Voluntary Euthanasia Society was founded in 1935 and had as its main objective the promotion of the bill that Millard had drafted. After the 1936 defeat, the Euthanasia Society continued to campaign for the rights of the terminally ill and for appropriate legislation to be passed. However, in another attempt in 1950, they were once again defeated. Efforts on the other side of the Atlantic had also been rendered useless, as the petition was temporarily shelved during World War II. On more than one occasion, I came across an interesting curiosity, namely that in 1936, King George V received euthanasia, unofficially from Lord Dawson. Now, while British authorities categorically deny it, there are those scholars who insist on discrediting this view. See Chris Docker, M. Phil. (Law and Ethics in Medicine) director of EXIT available at <www.euthanasia.cc/>.

[113] Christiaan Barnard, *Good Life Good Death: A Doctor's Case for Euthanasia and Suicide* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1980) 14.

[114] For a more in-depth rundown of these cases see Humphry 16-18.

However, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Nazi concept of '*lebensunwerten Leben*' – 'life not worthy of life' – had afforded the grounds for the Nazi practice of indiscriminately murdering hundreds upon thousands of people who had mental or physical disabilities or were enfeebled due to illness or old age. The chosen term for this undertaking was 'euthanasia' which would forever alter its meaning. The end-of-war trials, by their very nature, did little to bolster the public's confidence that legalising voluntary euthanasia was not the thin edge of the wedge. And so it was that these events were to trace a different outcome and society proved not to be quite ready to take such a leap. Indeed, never again would euthanasia be defined as the ancient Greeks and Romans had perceived it.

Right-to-life movements have frequently employed versions of the 'slippery slope' argument (based on the German experience) in an appeal to what are seen as the predictable long-range consequences of the legalisation of euthanasia. The general public's opinion to the Nazi euthanasia programme was one of revulsion, thereby pushing the campaign for euthanasia back into the shadows, where it remained for the better part of the next forty years.[115]

By 1970, the euthanasia debate had once again become popular, and the public appetite for death was fed by a huge crop of books, magazines and newspaper articles, which ranged from highly personal accounts to specialised works for academics and professionals. The cinematographic world picked up on this wave of enthusiasm and decided to ride the crest. Soon enough, tales dealing with death were splashed across the silver screen or flickered on in people's homes with the single push of a television button. When advanced technology

[115] I shall be discussing the importance of attitudes to euthanasia prior to and during World War II, and particularly the influence it had on both Huxley and Clark's work in later chapters. There is no shortage of literature in this matter, but I found the following authors dealt with the issue in an interesting and objective manner: David Lamb, *Down the Slippery Slope: Arguing in Applied Ethics* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion: An Argument about Abortion and Euthanasia* (London: Harper, 1993); Jonathan Gould, and Lord Craigmyle, eds., *Your Death Warrant? The Implications of Euthanasia: A Medical, Legal and Ethical Study* (London: Chapman, 1971). Although the euthanasia debate was not in the limelight for some years, the movement continued to attract a number of prominent supporters, including literati such as Walter C. Alvarez, Robert Frost, W. Somerset Maugham, H. G. Wells, G. H. Trevelyan and Margaret Sanger, amongst others.

made it possible to delay death or extend life in dying patients, it helped to fuel further much of the public discussion and saw the promotion of the 'quality of life' ethic, according to which the lives of certain people were considered of inferior quality because of some defect or disadvantage, because of the burden that such people placed on others, or because it was deemed too costly for society to provide care and sustenance to keep them alive. It was finally in 1975, after a highly publicised incident in the United States, that the pro-euthanasia movement gained significant momentum.[116]

Such polemical events took place on both sides of the Atlantic and the shock waves were felt throughout the world. Indeed, it did not take long for voluntary euthanasia societies to begin sprouting up, from Japan to Australia, from South Africa to Holland, throwing the already much-talked-about topic further into the limelight and nearer legalisation.[117] Unarguably, the media's handling of such cases helped turn each into a sensationalist event.

It became a mad craze to scramble onto the euthanasia bandwagon and everyone who was anyone, from politicians to physicians, from academics to

[116] A 21-year-old woman named Karen Ann Quinlan suffered a respiratory arrest that resulted in severe and irreversible brain damage and left her in a coma. Several months later, after doctors informed her parents that her recovery was extremely unlikely, Quinlan's parents requested that artificial means of life support be removed. The hospital's refusal threw both parties into a fierce legal battle. The Quinlans obtained a court order allowing them to remove the artificial respirator that was thought to be keeping their daughter alive. This decision spawned increased discussion of the scope of patients' rights to control their death. The Supreme Court had ruled that the device could be disconnected, thus allowing the patient 'to die with dignity'. Euthanasia advocates at the time naturally snatched up the catchy phrase and it has since then evolved into the euphemistic 'death with dignity'. Certainly, defenders of both views have not been adverse to the manipulation of language in order to gain public acceptance of their agenda. For instance, pro-euthanasia activists are prone to use emotive terms such as: 'aid in dying', 'right to choice' and 'easy death' whilst on the other end of the spectre are the anti-euthanasia activists with equally emotive and convincing phrases like: 'death industry', 'legalised murder' and 'medical apocalypse'.

[117] In 1977, the Dutch Medical Council officially accepted voluntary euthanasia, thus taking the debate a step further. It would be worthwhile to note that in England the statute against attempted suicide was only abolished in 1961, although, to this day, in many countries secular law continues to hold attempted suicide a crime and therefore punishable. The passing of the 1961 Suicide Act allowed activists in England to draw an analogy between proposals for the legalisation of euthanasia and the fact that it was lawful to take one's life. In other words, it was now argued that the choice to end one's life should rest with the individual and not others. Although euthanasia is kindred to suicide, it is not regarded as suicide by many thinkers, because whereas suicide is seen as self-murder, in which a man dies by his own hand, euthanasia requires the hand of another.

theologians, from filmmakers to writers, spoke out passionately either against or in favour of euthanasia. It was only natural therefore that the world of theatre should also climb aboard, and 1978 saw Brian Clark's contribution and challenging approach to this prickly issue in his stage play *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*. Certainly, such issues had always been portrayed in English theatre, and Brian Clark (1932-) took the step forward, confident that as the issue was practically on everyone's lips putting it up on stage would add another dimension to the debate; a debate which, although ancient, was in fact making waves yet again in a world which was quite different, particularly in technological terms, to that of the ancient Greeks or Romans'.

Whose Life Is It Anyway? is mostly a debate, realistically presented as drama, which promotes discussion about the amount of choice, free will and right to dignity that we have in our own lives, and about the social, medical and legal ethics enveloping these issues. It is a debate which centres primarily on common welfare *versus* private interest. This is especially because given the rapid advancement in science and medical knowledge, life expectancy has increased, and patients who would otherwise not survive can have their lives artificially prolonged with the aid of technology, thereby raising complex issues of an individual's right to determine when and how to die. One of the underlying motives behind Clark writing *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* clearly lies in the spirit of an era of unquestioningly active social movements, in which age-old assumptions were being challenged. There was a need to bring issues about death and dying that had previously been taboo out into the open for straightforward and unprejudiced discussion.

1.6. "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants"[118]

In order to grasp the extent to which the creative imaginations of More, Huxley and Clark were influenced by thinkers, who were both their predecessors and contemporaries, it has been imperative to understand the placement of euthanasia in various domains of English culture. Such has the nature of this chapter been: to travel along paths trodden by so many other thinkers before, in an attempt to shed light on so many puzzling questions, particularly those which need answering so as to trace the rationale that led More, Huxley and Clark to address such an issue. And, although it is said that there are more questions than answers, there is one answer I feel I have reached confidently and that is beyond any shadow of a doubt: that the euthanasia debate remains a long-drawn-out battle with little prospect of any solution near-at-hand. For the presence of euthanasia remains a frequent and prominent theme in English literature and philosophy, thus leaving the impression that there is something quite special about the placement of euthanasia in English culture. I believe that the three literary works, *Utopia*, *Brave New World* and *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*, in their own grandness, go beyond the boundaries of contemporary thought, for their times and for the present-day, and continue to question fundamental truths in society and by the same token promote discussion. Therefore, the challenging task that lies ahead of me now is the close contemplation of the meanderings of these literary works. Sir Isaac Newton put it so aptly: "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."[119] By no means am I proposing such a feat, but rather I shall keep my guise of a meek mouse and try to gather enough courage to scuttle but a little closer to the large arena in the hopes that I too may be able to see further.

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[118] Sir Isaac Newton in a letter to Robert Hooke, 5 February 1675 taken from *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Quotations*, (Bloomsbury: London, 1987) 249.
[119] Newton 249.

II

THE ARENA

Despite the substantial amount of page turning of my copy of *Utopia* evidenced in the subsequent wear and tear thereof, I cannot but continue to experience a tremendous sense of awe whenever I either casually skim through or eagerly seek out relevant details. It is surely an enigma how such a modest-sized and flippant-toned book is still bursting with a limitless number of serious, puzzling and, quite frankly, disturbing questions even for our era. Thomas More was equally enigmatic in providing answers to these questions, a fact which may to a certain degree explain much of the academic discord which has accompanied it since its creation many hundreds of years ago. I agree with the view that part of the discord resides in the mysteriousness of his nature. For, while some see him as a man far ahead of his time, still others see him as overly conservative, whose ideal community was modelled on that of a medieval monastery. And, more dismissingly are those who claim that *Utopia* is nothing more than a display of his wit and humour – a joke. The speculations go on and on. Regardless of what More really meant, the fact of the matter is that *Utopia* has exerted a tremendous amount of influence over the minds of many, for whom it remains: "a compassionate and generous book, as well as a witty one – that is, a book interested in living people and the way they live, not just in verbal phantoms and personae."[1]

It could therefore only be ironic that More himself regretted having published *Utopia* soon after its publication, although it might be regarded as being a common and legitimate reaction. He feared that few were disposed to grasp the same meaning he had. Fox speculates:

[1] Robert M. Adams, preface, *Utopia*, by Sir Thomas More, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1992) vii.

> *Utopia* was the last occasion on which More succumbed to the temptation of airing the innermost complexities of his private thought in public. This book was the culmination of a strategy that had begun with the tacit contextual ironies of the earlier works, but which, after *Utopia*, was exhausted in its possibilities, dangerous for the misconceptions it could arouse, and unnecessary in any case.[2]

Fox goes on to explain that after *Utopia*, More began to fashion his creative works along different lines, learning from his own experiences and discoveries, and, being less ambiguous, he wrote essentially for others.[3] "More could afford to let them be so," concludes Fox, "because after *Utopia* he no longer had to struggle to find out what he understood about life and himself."[4]

The literary canons of utopian fiction include Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia* which were responsible for both the generic name and genre creation. They fathered many literary offspring from utopian to dystopian fiction: Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, H. G. Well's *In the Days of the Comet*, Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Big Brother*, to mention but a handful. In these texts, society is generally maintained in equilibrium through the denial of individuality. Essentially, they present humanity's desires and fears, building on that universal human longing for perfection and ultimately happiness. "Their imaginative excitement," writes Carey, "comes from the recognition that

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[2] Alistair Fox, *Thomas More: History and Providence*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982) 73.

[3] I mentioned that More's critical reaction might be seen as being common and legitimate because it certainly seems to be the norm for most artists looking back some time later upon their work. For instance, Huxley, nearly thirty years after writing *Brave New World* wrote *Brave New World Revisited* in which he not only scrupulously compares the progress of his prophecies against reality, but he also comments on how pointless it would be to brood over the literary shortcomings of so many years before "to attempt to patch a faulty work into the perfection it missed at its first execution, to spend one's middle age in trying to mend the artistic sins committed and bequeathed by that different person who was oneself in youth – all this is surely vain and futile." Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Chatto, 1958) xix. However, unlike More, Huxley did not have to concern himself with a King who did not care much for freedom of expression. In More's case, unfortunately, the blade proved his concerns to be only too well founded.

[4] Fox 74. He further speculates that *De Tristitia Christi* was perhaps the only other exception. I believe More was not overly concerned with the dozen or so lines he wrote about the Utopians' approval of euthanasia, for there are far more serious issues that he addresses in *Utopia* and which could be misconstrued as a direct attack on the King's ruling hand, or suggest in any way an unchristian stance.

everything inside our heads, and much outside, are human constructs and can be changed."[5] These writers focus, to a greater or lesser extent, on controversial issues like euthanasia, suicide and eugenics, which ultimately exposes intractable and awkward divisions within them – and within the reader. However, it is how and what to change that is endlessly controversial and I am greatly inclined to agree with Carey when he states that: "it generates divisiveness."[6]

Did More possess any of these intractable and awkward divisions? In this chapter, I propose to investigate the underlying motives behind More's discussion of euthanasia in *Utopia*. For, the contradictions between his own religious beliefs and the principles upheld on the island of Utopia at the very least allow for scintillating discussion. Furthermore, I shall endeavour to single out the relevant approaches that he used to address the issue both through close reading, as well as by carefully sifting through the great abundance of academic material available. However, in order to do so, it is necessary, yet again, to be catapulted back in time many many hundreds of years from hence, back to many years ago, long before More's forefathers.

2.1. The Classical World Resurrected

Overall, it is agreed that Socrates was the first philosopher to bring to the fore what must be the ultimate question for mankind: how do we live a good life? Undeniably, there have been many sage thinkers, both before and after Socrates, who have conjectured about the circumstances and signs of a good life, about what exactly makes one life meaningful and desirable as opposed to one, which is worthless and sometimes even dreaded. For instance, Socrates believed that self-knowledge holds the key to a good life, whereas Aristotle said that it lies in the excellence of talent and skill. Some ancient schools of philosophy appealed to hedonism: that one ought to follow those desires that give one pleasure. Christian

[5] John Carey, introduction, *The Faber Book of Utopias*, ed. John Carey (London: Faber, 1999) xi.
[6] Carey, introduction xii.

doctrine still preaches that a good life may only be found in worshipping and loving God. Hume felt that it consists in the satisfaction of what one honestly and naturally wants, and Bentham in as much pleasure as possible. Where, I wonder, does More stand? And, by the same token, Huxley and Clark? What influence have these philosophical doctrines exerted on the creative process of these men? [7]

Being the ardent Catholic that he was, More sought many of his answers in the Bible and in the comfortingly convincing words of other equally religiously impassioned and wise men, the likings of St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. And, as one of the greatest humanists of his time, More shared in the renewed interest in the ancients and their writings, thoughts and convictions, which both delighted him and left him with a tremendous desire for more. Indeed, he was able to quench much of his thirst for knowledge and appease his insatiable appetite for learning from reading ancient Greek and Roman texts. It remains curious that in England and throughout most of Europe, at a time when self-inflicted death was still very much taboo and the possibility of any consensus on euthanasia was as inflammable as wet ashes, suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere, the issue makes its appearance in one of the least likely places: from the hand of a man who, despite facing the hangman's noose, would turn down the quicker exit of self-inflicted death because of his religious convictions. Could he have written *Utopia* in the brashness of youth? The nature of philosophy of the Middle Ages and, to a lesser extent, that of the Renaissance is scholastic. And, as a humanist standing on the threshold of one of the most marked periods in human history, More looked back to classical antiquity and forward to a secularised political future, all of which, naturally, whilst holding firmly onto the Bible.

[7] In order to reach any semblance of answer, I ask forbearance a while longer, for if a house is to be firmly built, there is need of a sturdy foundation. Consequently, by referring once more to the ancient world, I am not in any way proposing any advanced study of it, nor am I about to embark on any philosophical discussion about the ethics of right and wrong and good and bad in human life. Rather, I would like to trace the thread linking the origins of thinking about ethics and the contemporary debate, and how this has been relevant to the euthanasia debate, particularly regarding literature. It is this age-old question, which will serve as the springboard for the discussion that follows and also because I am inclined to believe that essentially it is this very question – how do we live a good life? – that sits at the core of the euthanasia debate.

The courtship between philosophy and religion has been long-lasting and so intertwined are the two that on some points they appear distinct from each other and yet on others are so familiar. The fact that the different schools of philosophy have always borrowed from each other (together with a number of religious developments, in particular the appearance of Christianity) is important for the subsequent history of intellectual thought in European cultures, which may help to explain much of the overlapping between philosophical and religious doctrines. After all, was it not Bacon who said that no man is an island? Indeed, this seems to be quite true, for not even the Utopians on their island in the middle of nowhere are immune to external influences. On the contrary, "they love to hear what is happening throughout the world."[8] And, from Hythloday's comment on their being instructed in Greek, it can be seen that they are eager learners: "they picked up the forms of the letters so quickly, pronounced the language so aptly, memorized it so quickly, and began to recite so accurately that it seemed like a miracle." [9]

2.2. "Silver and Gold Have I None, But Such As I Have I Give unto Thee"[10]

In England, most of the original Greek texts remained untouched until they were rediscovered and translated into Latin in the Renaissance. Plato and the Neoplatonists played a markedly vitalizing role in the history of European thought, and through St Augustine, jointly with a few other religious thinkers, these pagan ideas came to exercise a formative influence on Christianity and ended up by being assimilated into Christian teachings. To a specialist in the field, it does not take long to come across instances of this homogenisation. Yet, despite not being a specialist, I shall attempt to illustrate just how one such instance is

[8] Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1992) 59. Unless otherwise stated, I shall be using this edition when making any quotes from the actual text of *Utopia.*

[9] More, *Utopia* 57.

[10] These are the words from a well-known hymn and the catchy tune has made it a firm favourite, especially among the younger Christian churchgoers.

evident in *Utopia*, *Brave New World* and *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* and then take it a step further and analyse how it is relevant to the euthanasia debate. [11]

An affinity between doctrines of the ancient philosophers and the New Testament is unmistakable. Baldwin writes: "[in Plato's *Timaeus*] Man is a composite being, and should attempt to release his spirit from the slavery of matter so that it can ascend and be flooded with the Divine Light."[12] There are bountiful sources in the New Testament where the Christian is encouraged to reject the material world and seek out the truth in Christ.[13]

The ideal Utopian order is founded on the principle of reason, and Utopians see it as irrational not to value things only according to their usefulness, holding, for instance, that: "the same style of clothing … does not hamper bodily movement, and serves for warmth as well as cold weather."[14] Ostentatious clothing is therefore deemed unnecessary and in direct conflict with their natural, ethical and integral way of life, as is the case for silver and gold: "their chamber pots and stools … all their humblest vessels … are made of gold and silver … thus they hold gold and silver up to scorn in every conceivable way."[15] On his imaginary island of Utopia, More has uprooted the vice of luxury ("abolished not

[11] Although the weight of these heathen philosophies was great on St Augustine, he was the one who eventually broke away, but not without first absorbing pagan ideas into Western Christian theology. These were pagan ideas that never quite lost their characteristic mark, and even centuries down the line this presence is still discernable. Singer concurs that Plato's ideas still ring out in many conservative religious doctrines as may be gathered from the following: "Starting from the position that God has put us here on earth for a purpose, they [Roman Catholics and Protestant Conservatives] see suicide as something like desertion from the military, except that the suicide is disobeying orders from the Supreme Commander." Peter Singer, "Getting the Facts Right on Dutch Euthanasia," *The Daily Princetonian* 7 April 2000, 9 June 2005 <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer>. He goes on to explain that the movement to legalise voluntary euthanasia has gone forward relatively unchallenged in certain countries because of the decline of traditional Christianity where church attendance has fallen to very low levels. See also pages 25-27 of this study.

[12] Anna Baldwin, "The Early Christian Period and the Middle Ages: Introduction," *Platonism and the English Imagination*, eds. Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 21-22.

[13] There are many such references in the New Testament, particularly in the Books of St Luke, St Mark and St John, especially in the parables that Jesus told.

[14] More, *Utopia* 36-37.

[15] More, *Utopia* 47.

only money but also greed"[16]), leaving only concern for the happiness and spiritual well-being of the Utopians.

In stark contrast are the citizens of the World State who are encouraged (or should I say conditioned) to consume manufactured goods in large quantities as may be discerned in the words of the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning: "Imagine the folly of allowing people … do nothing whatever to increase consumption."[17] While still bottled, new citizens of the World State are being conditioned, by means of hypnopaedia or sleep-teaching: "Ending is better than mending. The more stitches, the less riches …"[18] In order for economic prosperity and scientific advancement to be viable in this society, it is necessary for its citizens to consume en masse, thereby serving a social utility; ensuring that the giant wheel of *soma*-happiness continues to turn.

Essentially, what I am hoping to bring to the fore with this discussion is that the predicaments which envelope the euthanasia debate have a lot to do with society's moral fibre, with the fundamental ethical values which society holds above all else. For many pro-life activists, the kernel of the dilemma lies precisely here, because the apparent lack of scruples and absence of intrinsic morals in some people invites eventual abuse.

On the island of Utopia, counsel is given by priests whose main concern is to end needless suffering in view of the fact that that suffering serves no end either to the individual or to society. There is no greedy member of the family hanging about in the side wings waiting to pounce on a wholesome inheritance. The lure of material accumulation and avarice has been removed as a possible motivation for terminating someone's life. It is equally important to bear in mind that those who are sick are cared for: "nothing is neglected in the way of medicine or diet which might cure them."[19] Should someone who is suffering from an

[16] More, *Utopia* 83.
[17] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Flamingo, 1994) 26. Unless otherwise stated, this is the edition I shall be using when quoting from *Brave New World*.
[18] Huxley, *World* 44.
[19] More, *Utopia* 60.

incurable disease decide against euthanasia then: "everything is done to mitigate the pain … visitors do their best to console them by sitting and talking with them."[20] In other words, although the counsel of priests has been sought, the final word rests with the terminally ill person lying upon his deathbed.

In the World State, concern with terminating life is not a question of morality or loose scruples of a physician or greedy kin, but rather it has to do with sound economic sense.[21] As the mending and repairing of goods is not encouraged and the mere contemplation of hand-me-downs is repugnant, the motive of getting richer at another's demise would not be the motivation behind bringing life to an end. Rather, predestination surrogate defines death. It is simply a question of logistics, economic stability and social utility, for even corpses are exploited as a handy source of phosphorous:

> '… P_2O_5 used to go right out of circulation every time they cremated someone. Now they recover over ninety-eight per cent of it. More than a kilo and a half per adult corpse. Which makes the best part of four hundred tons of phosphorus every year from England alone.' Henry spoke with a happy pride, rejoicing wholeheartedly in the achievement, as though it had been his own.
> 'Fine to think we can go on being socially useful even after we're dead. Making plants grow.'[22]

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[20] More, *Utopia* 60.

[21] Another perspective on this view in presented in the article by Allen Wood: "Marx against Morality," *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 511-524. He explains that Marx regularly describes morality, religion and law: "as forms of ideology … so many bourgeois prejudices behind which lurk just as many bourgeois interests" (511). What would the paradigms be in the 'selection' process? Could this 'selection' be driven by motives other than interest in the patient's so-claimed welfare or are there dangers that lurk? Could a small amount of justified legalised voluntary euthanasia today become the thin edge of the wedge for enforced euthanasia tomorrow? Admittedly, Marx's arguments go much deeper and some are filled with complexities beyond my comprehension, but what I wish to draw attention to here is Marx's insistence in arguing that bourgeois interests are purely economic. It is also worthwhile recalling his sanctioning of euthanasia. (See page 45 of this study.)

[22] Huxley, *Brave New World* 65. According to my calculations that makes it close on two hundred and seventy thousand adult corpses that had to be cremated every year, and not to forget that this is from England alone. Phosphorus is used extensively in chemical fertilizers, especially for making plants grow faster.

By no means am I suggesting that all those who advocate euthanasia in our present-day society are hungry blood sucking leeches interested only in a generous inheritance or any petty change that they may pounce on upon the death of a family member, or that all physicians are crazed versions of Dr. Doom, who, void of scruples, hover about eagerly awaiting the chance to pull the plug on some poor defenceless and unsuspecting patient. In *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* both Ken's fiancée and his parents have all but been completely removed, certainly they have not been given a voice, and so offer no undue complications to the plot in that regard. Above all, Ken's battle is with bureaucratic hospital administration and authoritative physicians, the likes of Dr Emerson, who see it as his infinite duty to preserve life, regardless of his patient's wishes:

> DR EMERSON. My power isn't arbitrary; I've earned it with knowledge and skill and it's also subject to the laws of nature.[23]

What I am hoping to do with this line of thought is to offer an explanation as to why so many people disagree over the ethical question of euthanasia. Essentially, it lies in the belief that morality is not like science, which is concerned with facts, but on the contrary, it is a matter of values, about which we can only have personal opinions. "While science is objective," states Graham, "morality is essentially subjective."[24] Furthermore, it is an issue that also involves one of the main concerns in the three literary works under study, namely that of the spiritual and the physical well-being. Indeed, covetousness, which is one of the seven deadly sins – usually given as pride, envy, anger, sloth, covetousness, gluttony and lust – is frequently personified in medieval literature, and it has remained a matter of concern for both religious and secular thinkers throughout the times, particularly with the advent of machinery and mass production.

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[23] Brian Clark, *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989) 65.
[24] Graham 60.

2.3. Setting out on a Quest

Although this study is mostly a discussion of the moral issues enveloping the euthanasia debate and how they are portrayed in English literature (with special focus on the literary works by More, Huxley and Clark) it is virtually impossible not to tangle with the law and the intricate web it spins around society.

Many campaigners for the legalisation of euthanasia have quoted freely from *Utopia* as evidence of More's true opinion and have even expressed surprise that, in view of such evidence, Catholics remain opposed to euthanasia and its eventual legalisation. However, this would in all likelihood be a crass mistake. It supposes that More was expressing his own ideal as a Catholic, and this is simply missing the whole point of *Utopia.* His own family very often was unable to tell whether he was merely joking or in earnest, and he left this dichotomous mark on *Utopia* too. His main concern in writing this delicate satire was to describe just how preferable the heathen Utopian society was to many Renaissance societies of his own day. By no means did More condone all of the Utopians' practices, as he himself affirms at the end of Book Two: "I cannot agree with everything he said. Yet I confess there are many things in the Commonwealth of Utopia that I wish our own country would imitate."[25] It remains enigmatic how he never states outright what he does not agree with and which 'things' he wishes his country would imitate.

Indeed, the contradictions between More's own deep religious convictions and the principles upheld in *Utopia* are divisive[26] and at the very least puzzling for many readers and academics alike. For, More led a life of religious devotion, and yet, on the island of Utopia, euthanasia is allowed under certain circumstances as for instance: "[when] life is simply torture and the world a mere prison cell … he [a man suffering from an incurable disease] should not hesitate to free himself, or

[25] More, *Utopia* 85.
[26] See Carey, introduction xii.

to let others free him."[27] This is clearly an infringement of the basic teachings of the Catholic Church, which had not claimed the power to allow any type of suicide. Under these circumstances, if the person contemplating suicide waited for authorisation, no suicide would be possible in More's time, but rather he could expect condemnation and possibly prosecution, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. The reader is left further baffled when More, who appears as a character in the discussion, expresses his disagreement with the arguments his own book presents: "it seemed to me that not a few of the customs and laws he had described as existing among the Utopians were quite absurd."[28] What then were More's motives for writing something apparently in contradiction to his beliefs?

2.3.1. Dialogue

The answer to such a question appears to be manifold, and I have decided to begin my quest by examining a very enlightening article that Campbell has written in which he attributes the popular misunderstanding of More's own views and beliefs to the fact that *Utopia* was written in the form of a dialogue.[29] Indeed, More's work is not a manifesto, but rather a labyrinth of detailed and at times almost cryptic meditation concerning the best state of the ideal commonwealth. Seated in the most delightful of settings, which serves as a stimulant to pleasant conversation, the traveller Raphael Hythloday, who becomes the principal speaker in the Utopian dialogue, embarks on the intoxicatingly enthralling tale of the island of Utopia to two other characters, Peter Giles and Thomas More himself. And naturally, as is the case in most conversations, there

[27] More, *Utopia* 60.
[28] More, *Utopia* 84.
[29] W.E. Campbell, "The *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More," *Papers Read to the Thomas More Society of London: The King's Good Servant* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948) 26-39. Campbell explains that More has been greatly discredited because of his apparent inconsistency in *Utopia*, and particularly unfortunate is that this literary masterpiece has been used as the bedrock of communist policies. His views are championed by many fellow academics.

are moments when More's own beliefs are not in conformity with Hythloday's and he voices them quite readily under his own name: "'But I don't see it that way,' I replied. 'It seems to me that men cannot possibly live well where all things are in common … I for one cannot conceive of authority existing among men who are equal to one another in every aspect.'"[30]

In order to be completely impartial therefore to More's true beliefs, should only those words that More himself utters be considered? And, why exactly does he make such convincing arguments come from the mouth of a man whose name means 'speaker of nonsense' and who describes an island, whose own name reveals its geographical position – nowhere? Campbell speculates that: "in order the more thoroughly to expose the weakness of your opponent's case, you should first of all state it even more strongly than he has been able to do. Now surely this is what More has done in his *Utopia*?"[31] Indeed, this argument seems to make perfect sense, for what better way to know your opponent than to stand in his shoes. After all, More was a lawyer by profession, and a successful one at that, so he was accustomed to laying out the cards to weigh up a situation prudently and rationally. This of course leads me to the next question – Who exactly is the opponent in this story?

Perhaps, the answer does not lie wholly within *Utopia* itself, but it may also reside in the fact that at this time Henry VIII was doing his utmost to win More over into political and court life. Doubtless that More must have wrestled at length with the pros and cons of such a compelling, yet complex and precarious position, for after all it was an invitation from Henry VIII, and, although still a young prince at the time, he was known to be wilful and impetuous. More's son-in-law William Roper recalls More's advice to Thomas Cromwell when he first took office under Henry VIII:

[30] More, *Utopia* 29.
[31] Campbell, "The Utopia" 28.

> … you are now entered into the service of a most noble, wise, and liberal king. If you will follow my poor advice, you shall, in your counsel-giving unto his grace, ever tell him what he ought to do but never what he is able to do. So shall you show yourself a true faithful servant and a right worthy counsellor. For if a lion knew his own strength, hard were it for any man to rule him.[32]

Perhaps then it should be unsurprising that much of the dialogue in *Utopia* seems to be More weighing up the different approaches to the many doubts he had in regards this royal request. It seems that what concerned him most – whether a philosopher could be of any service to a king – was well founded, for More was to die "the King's good servant, but God's first."[33] Indeed, More toiled throughout his lifetime to maintain the right relationship between the spiritual and temporal powers. Toil that which would nevertheless not only allow the temporal powers to be victorious, but which ironically would also ensure the consecration of his martyrdom and eventual sainthood. Campbell affirms: "Sir Thomas More is one of the central figures in this world-drama of the moral against the material order ... one of the most potent symbols in European history for the transmission of the ideal of spiritual freedom."[34] Indeed, More's last words on the scaffold – "the King's good servant, but God's first" – serve as a benchmark for his steadfastness to the Catholic faith.

Therefore, if More's use of dialogue was to voice his "opponent's case" so convincingly that ultimately he might refute it, then, in the wake of this idea, I could argue that by having Hythloday say that the Utopians favour euthanasia, More could be gathering material to build up a stronger case against his opponent. It is a common outstanding strategy in debating – to know your opponent's viewpoints even better than your own so as to hold the upper-hand in the rebuttal.

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[32] William Roper, *The Life of Sir Thomas More* in *Two Early Tudor Lives: "The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey" by George Cavendish "The Life of Sir Thomas More" by William Roper,* eds. Richard S. Sylvester and Davis P. Harding (New Haven: Yale UP, 1978) 228.
[33] R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (Sussex: Harvester P, 1981) 349.
[34] Campbell, "The Utopia" 35.

Furthermore, and as would be expected, in any attack that has been well prepared, the various elements relevant to the case must not be seen in isolation.

One such important element is the fact that More's knowledge of Greek classical thought was remarkable and he was familiar with the doctrines of the various schools of philosophy, Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, Epicurean and Stoic, among others, as well as their views on suicide and euthanasia. It was Plato's knowledge as a philosopher and skills as a writer in particular which aroused great interest in the Renaissance intellectual mind.[35] Many writers saw in Plato a source of inspiration, a spur to literary creativity and an incentive to poetic imagination, which can only be paradoxical because Plato was notoriously dismissive about the value of literature.[36] Nevertheless, his accomplished mastery of various styles of writing is one of the reasons for the magnitude and range of his influence. His early dialogues have an informal and conversational tone to them compared to his abstract philosophising or still the lyrical and poetic style of his myths. And, much like More in *Utopia*, in *The Republic* Socrates is represented as eliciting, in the course of a discussion on justice, the ideal type of state. It is a state run by philosophers who are able to tell good from bad; the perfect forms of goodness, truth, and beauty are cultivated, and everything repugnant to them is excluded. For More, Plato's appeal did not lie inasmuch in his concern with moral philosophy as it did with his political concern.

A further important element is that More was well acquainted with the writings of Seneca and Cicero, who are known to have regarded suicide as an honourable end to a life that was thought to be unbearable. The writings of

[35] Plato's Socratic *Dialogues* are philosophical debates or dramas, which employ the heuristic and dialectical method of question and answer. Aristotle used the form for more specifically didactic purposes.

[36] Anne Sheppard purports that it was the Neoplatonist interpretation of Plato that transformed him into such an intellectual beacon for future literary minds. She writes: "When Plato discusses literature he is concerned not with individual creativity or artistic imagination but with the truthfulness of poetic representations. He holds consistently that poets, however fine their work, lack the knowledge which is the hallmark of the philosopher." Anne Sheppard, "Plato and the Neoplatonists," *Platonism and the English Imagination*, eds. Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 12.

St Augustine and Aquinas, which had their fair share of ancient classical philosophical influence, vehemently condemned self-inflicted death.[37] And, while the issue of euthanasia might have been no stone in More's shoe, perhaps the odd few lines served merely and temporarily to lighten the burden on his shoulders – of whether he could serve his king and remain consistent to his beliefs, or perhaps it served as one of the oldest tricks in the book: when facing an opponent, try to catch him off guard. Decidedly, More's employment of dialogue certainly seems to have served as a catalyst to achieve his objective.

Dialogue is a literary technique that writers frequently resort to for the widest variety of reasons. On the one hand, it often allows them the window at which to stand and voice their own opinions transparently and passionately, and on the other it serves as the perfect disguise for whatever the reason: political, personal, social or simply to allow the reader room for intellectual exercise and so 'read between the lines'.[38]

Much of the dialogue in *Brave New World* is jarring. Perhaps, it is so for the simple reason that at times it is chillingly realistic. The dialogue in *Brave New World* is riddled with innuendos and, at first sight, seemingly loose bits of information, but then as the story unfolds the reader is able to identify most of it and then gradually fits it all quite neatly into the greater puzzle, although arguably

[37] Aquinas' vast corpus reflects all too well the following: "his genius lay in the capacity to see how Greek thought and Catholic doctrine might be synthesised into a Christian philosophy." John Haldane, "Medieval and Renaissance Ethics," *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 141. Haldane goes on to explain how Aquinas draws parallels between those philosophical ideas "to give a rational foundation to ethics and thereby demonstrate an account of true virtue which could be compelling to any human being" (141). Indeed, throughout his life, More found theological and moral arguments quite compelling.

[38] I realise that there is a staggering amount of literature on this fascinating matter alone, but my objective now is not to enter into any intricate study. Rather, I would like to compare More's use of dialogue in *Utopia* to Huxley's in *Brave New World* and then finally to Clark's in *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* and highlight those elements which are relevant to the euthanasia debate. Furthermore, I would like to analyse how that traditional ethic has been addressed through one of the most powerful weapons known to mankind – the written word. For, it has been through the words of men and women that hopes and fears and experiences have been registered throughout time, from the very first moment that man scratched out a rudimentary line on a stone. These are the same hopes and fears and experiences I wish to trace in these three works, how their authors have grappled with the issue of ethics – the principles which should guide us when we make crucial decisions about how we should live.

there may be some pieces that remain missing at the end.[39] Huxley has made it that whenever citizens of the World State interact in dialogue their speech patterns seem almost mechanised, repetitive and void, not only of emotion but also of independent thought. Huxley's *Brave New World* is a satirical account of the dehumanising effect that science and industrialisation are likely to have on society, although it is admittedly more than just this. Chapter III in particular strongly highlights this point:

> 'Back to culture. Yes, actually to culture. You can't consume much if you sit still and read books.'
> …
> 'The ethics and philosophy of under-consumption …'
> 'I love new clothes, I love new clothes, I love …'
> …
> 'Like meat, like so much meat.'
> 'There was a thing called the soul and a thing called immortality.'
> …
> 'Euphoric, narcotic, pleasantly hallucinant.'
> '… What you need is a gramme of *soma*.'
> 'Gonadal hormones, transfusion of young blood, magnesium salts …'[40]

Huxley has outdone himself in this superb skilful play with dialogue. The rapid sequence and oscillation of dialogues taking place simultaneously between

[39] Huxley himself is aware of one such void, when he declares: "One vast and obvious failure of foresight is immediately apparent. *Brave New World* contains no reference to nuclear fission." Aldous Huxley, foreword, *Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley (London: Flamingo, 1994) n. pag.
[40] Huxley, *World* 44-48. There are three separate dialogues taking place simultaneously. Firstly is that of Mustapha Mond, the Resident Controller for Western Europe, and a group of students visiting the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, although the students say very little. The second dialogue takes place between Henry Foster and the nameless Assistant Predestinator, while Bernard Marx eavesdrops until he is reluctantly pulled into the conversation. The third dialogue takes place in the Girls' Dressing-room between Lenina Crowne and Fanny Crowne. It is striking for instance to compare the shallow exchange of words that takes place between Lenina and Fanny in this chapter to the intelligent and challenging dialogue we hear in chapter seven between John the Savage and Mustapha Mond. Huxley, *World* 210-219.

different characters cannot be a deed for just anyone and perhaps it is a reflection of his innate scientifically oriented perspective on things. The sentences start off complex in structure and length, but then they become simpler and simpler, and shorter and shorter, and at times are incomplete, leaving the reader to infer, almost instinctively, what would follow were the sentences ever completed. With hardly any leeway for thought, the reader is led through this long corridor of resounding conversation, passing open doors and picking up bits and pieces of incomplete sentences. It is not long before the dialogues gather a quasi-dizzy, fast moving momentum, which I liken to a machine that is turned on and as it warms up, picks up an increasingly faster rhythm. And, perhaps this must have been Huxley's intention. Through this rapid succession of dialogue, the reader is bombarded with images similar to those of a film when it has slipped the reel. Our eyes pick up flashes of images and our ears brim over with the clickety-click of the plastic film smacking against the metal projector. Such are the images that personify the citizens of the World State – emotionally futile, mechanical, foolish, hollow, soulless.

Participating in a quasi-collective monologue, these speakers have been so psychologically conditioned that they are bound by the limits that have been defined by years upon years of exhaustive sleep-teaching, *soma*[41] and the indoctrination of an industrial philosophy. They are literally being born off conveyor belts, like goods produced in mass quantities, so how could they possibly and rationally ever question death and who has control over it:

> 'Just returned … from the Slough Crematorium. Death conditioning begins at eighteen months. Every tot spends two mornings a week in a Hospital for the Dying. All the best toys are kept there, and they get chocolate cream on death

[41] '*Soma*' is a state-rationed-pleasure-inducing designer drug taken by the citizens of the New World state. This mild hallucinogenic drug leaves them feeling happy and at the same time intellectually uninteresting and emotionally stunted.

days. They learn to take dying as a matter of course.' 'Like any other physiological process,' put in the Head Mistress professionally.[42]

Although the word 'euthanasia' is not used in *Brave New World*, it is not unexpected, because in the year A.F. 632 terms have already been modified to suit their status quo.[43] This is a society in which industrial philosophy dominates every aspect of life, and consequently literature, history, even the very act of *thinking* have been eradicated: "not a moment to sit down and think … if ever by some unlucky chance such a crevice of time should yawn in the solid substance of their distractions, there is always *soma*."[44]

When the reader eventually realises that a World State citizen is disposed of and replaced like a minor cog in the social wheel, somehow the aftershock does not seem as violent. Honestly? It is almost expected. For, if the emotions that most people feel during lovemaking, conception, child labour and parenthood have been eliminated, then the emotions that are felt in illness and at the moment death are equally insignificant. One of the reasons for this is that there is no value placed on morality: "Moral education which ought never, in any circumstances, to be rational."[45] In a society which controls the very 'manufacturing' of life, surely it will more readily control death. A citizen that is non-functional in a consumerism driven society is an outsider and ostracised. Those, who are not physically up to par with the rest, those who are ill, those who are old, essentially those who have outlived their utility, have one remaining service they can render society – provide phosphorous. Society sees the individual as recyclable material.

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[42] Huxley, *World* 147-148

[43] *Brave New World* is set in A. F. 632, in other words 632 years after Henry Ford (1863-1947), the American car tycoon, successfully mass-produced the Model T motorcar. It is standard for dystopian societies to invest greatly in censorship and intellectual manipulation. I think it quite ironic that there is so much emphasis given to politically correct speech today, for in part it involves just that. After all, what is to be made of terms like 'dummy' and 'gypsy' that are now designated as 'pacifier' and 'traveller' respectively? Will name-changing really end prejudice and discrimination? One can only hope. Activist groups for and against euthanasia have also taken to this tendency. See footnote 117 on page 50 of this study.

[44] Huxley, *World* 49.

[45] Huxley, *World* 23.

The chapter ends on a 'mechanical note' of the ruby-red flashing of the switches that glow in the darkness, another symbol of mechanisation and superior technological advancement. "Slowly, majestically, with a faint humming of machinery, the Conveyors moved forward, thirty-three centimetres an hour. In the red darkness glinted innumerable rubies."[46] Machines, switches, levers and robot-like workers oversee the mass production of millions of identical twins. It is through dialogue that the reader is able to grapple satisfactorily with the full effects that the conditioning and manipulation, which these citizens have been subjected to since birth, have had. Contrary to the Utopians, they have no counsel offered them by men of philosophy, men of the cloth who are familiar with Good and Bad, and who will counsel, rationally and serenely, a man on his deathbed with only his interests at heart. Rather, citizens in this Brave New World accept things as they are without questioning why life has to terminate at sixty. They do not need to concern themselves with the moral dilemmas, which normally chaperone intolerable pain, terminal illness, disabilities or old age, because "no pains have been spared to make … lives emotionally easy – to preserve … so far as that is possible, from having emotions at all."[47]

Although Clark's *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* falls under quite a different literary genre and style to that of More and Huxley's literary works, its outspoken intentions are fundamentally cut from the same cloth. It is skilfully daring and novel in its approach in presenting a controversial debate from different angles. Ultimately, it aspires to allow individuals to explore alternatives to set social values in regards to the individual's right to choices over his own life.

As *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* is a play to be performed on a theatre stage,[48]

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[46] Huxley, *World* 50.
[47] Huxley, *World* 39.
[48] Written originally for Granada Television, *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* has had an extraordinary history. It was Granada's biggest-selling play ever and was seen by millions all over the world. In 1977, Clark adapted it for theatre where it became simultaneously an amazing hit and enormously influential. It was talked about not only as a play but as a contemporary issue and before long was having the same impact on Broadway and elsewhere around the world. Its significance has now spread far beyond the theatre and television into moral debate, legislative pressure group ideology and even into the set text lists of many medical schools and philosophy departments.

it would be reasonable to assume that there is the benefit of alternative elements of persuasion which may be wielded upon an audience. Advantage may be taken, for instance, of sound effects, lighting, props, and naturally the actors, who are the fundamental vessels conveying the words directly to the audience, allowing that the unquestionable marked presence and skilful mastery of the voice elicit emotions and opinions.

However, a play need not be performed at the theatre in order for a playwright's message to be received, for the spirit of *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* is embodied in the dialogues, whether the words are spoken aloud by actors on a stage or read in the privacy of innermost thoughts. Irrefutably, words and more specifically dialogue are the means by which Ken Harrison is able to accomplish his wishes, for he is paralysed from the neck down and therefore unable to relish in most bodily movements which, under other circumstances, would collaborate in communication. Perhaps, I can best illustrate this through citing such an occasion in which, were Ken's physical condition different to the one his accident has left him in, he would have behaved differently. Ken's body language no longer corresponds with his personality whatsoever:

> KEN. I said you have lovely breasts.
> DR SCOTT. What an odd thing to say.
> …
> DR SCOTT. I don't think it helps you to talk like this.
> KEN. Because I can't do anything about it you mean.
> …
> DR SCOTT. I'm sorry if I have provoked you … I can assure you …
> KEN. You haven't 'provoked' me, as you put it, but you
> are a woman and even though I've only a piece of
> knotted string between my legs, I still have a man's mind …[49]

[49] Clark, *Whose Life* 33-34.

This brief exchange of words between Ken Harrison and Dr Scott provides another glimpse of just how sharply his mind works and how he is quite aware of his capacities and, more painfully, of his incapacities. Furthermore, Clark has used John's character to bring to bear Ken's newfound reality, both through dialogue, which is filled with humour and generous amounts of sexual innuendo, as well as notes for stage direction. It does not take long to realise how ironic it is that John has become Ken's antithesis, because unlike Ken, he is able to put his words into action:

> NURSE SADLER *is taking kidney dishes and instruments out of the steriliser.* JOHN *creeps up behind her and seizes her around the waist.* NURSE SADLER *jumps, utters a muffled scream and drops a dish.*
> NURSE. Oh, it's you … Don't do that …
> JOHN. I couldn't help myself, honest my Lord. There was this vision …
> NURSE SADLER *has turned round to face JOHN, who has his arms either side of her against the table.*[50]

As euthanasia is not an issue which the layman would ordinarily discuss, for the very reason that it tends to drown him in sticky moral matter, Clark has chosen to address his audience directly in a modern and naturalistic form. And so, the accessibility of the dialogue on stage, quasi-conversational and matter-of-factly, permits the discussion on euthanasia to spill over onto the audience, maintaining a level of interest and raising questions of considerable substance, even for the amateur.

It is also through dialogue that Ken is able to challenge the medical and legal worlds to convince them of his will to die. This is the reason why he does not wish to be sedated, because, contrary to the citizens of the 'brave new world',

[50] Clark, *Whose Life* 15.

he wants to remain alert. He is more like a Utopian who has the intellectual capacity to think for himself, weigh up the pros and cons of his plight and arrive at the rational decision to terminate any form of artificial life support or medical assistance. But, unlike the Utopians, Ken is counselled not by a priest or men of philosophy, but rather by professionals in matters of life and death: a social worker, physicians, psychiatrists, lawyers and a judge, all of whom feel the burden of their professional commitment, as is the case with physicians who take the vow of the Hippocratic Oath.

Furthermore, Ken does not wish to take tranquillisers to dull his emotions or senses but rather he claims the right to a mind void of obstructions: "If the only feeling I have is in my head … I want to feel."[51] This is the reverse of the citizens of the Brave New World who consume *soma* at every given moment. It is important to have a clear mind so as to engage in meaningful coherent dialogue like the Utopians who, in clear consciousness, have that choice: "[to] either starve themselves to death or take a potion which puts them painlessly to sleep, and frees them from life without any sensation of dying."[52]

Stoic in outlook, Ken expresses that life is not worth living when it does not fulfil the definition of life: "It is quite pathetic, after all, if one has put the will to die behind one, to be without the will to live."[53] Clark has transposed similar philosophical ideals into Ken's words when he says: "Nor do I wish to live at any price. Of course I want to live but as far as I'm concerned, I'm dead already … I cannot accept this condition constitutes life in any real sense at all."[54] Powerful and thought-provoking words, indeed.

[51] Clark, *Whose Life* 14.
[52] More, *Utopia* 60.
[53] Seneca, LXXVIII: 132.
[54] Clark, *Whose Life* 72.

2.3.2. “No Man Is an Island”

Part of the answer to the question – what then were More’s motives for writing something apparently in contradiction to his beliefs? – may reside in the dichotomy within More’s own personality, “the rationalist committed to a religious faith with a hair-shirt concealed beneath his humanist garb.”[55] Perhaps *Utopia* was his way of yielding to his wit and intellect, letting the humanist side of his nature roam at leisure, momentarily set free from the constraints of his Christian principles. In that way, he was able to contemplate as a Renaissance thinker on how, upon such an island as Utopia, man might make the most of the resources of his reason to set patterns of moral and social behaviour, without the intervention of ecclesiastical presence. For, Utopia is nowhere, but in the imagination where it is possible to wander, untouched by personal duties and virtues, and where it is possible to ‘misbehave’ and get away with it. After all, who is there to reprimand? And, just as More’s England was an island from which the English could set sail, or upon which foreign ships could lower their anchors, his intellectualism was also like an island, isolated but not unreachable. Indeed, More was not adverse to what different environments could offer him, but rather he was always keen to learn.

More’s consciousness did not allow him to get away without being duly punished, for he was an ardent pupil of corporal punishment as a means of redeeming himself of his sins. His son-in-law writes how: “he used also sometimes to punish his body with whips, cords knotted, which was known only to my wife … whom for her secrecy above all other he specially trusted, causing her as need required to wash the same shirt of hair.”[56]

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[55] Murray Roston, *MacMillan History of Literature: Sixteenth Century English Literature*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: MacMillan, 1982) 20.

[56] Roper 224. Although self inflicted punishment might seem bizarre, in truth, it was not such an unusual ritual for those times, and even today it remains in certain cultures a form of penitence and: “a form of purification, for in order for the soul to be expiated the body must be cleansed of sin … through the shedding of blood.” Margaret Pabst Battin, *The Least Worst Death*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 11.

Although in More's time men yearned for the golden past the classical version – "Eden before the Fall, when the conditions of man's life were ideal and the earth yielded its fruits in abundance,"[57] – More pondered man's capacity to create an operational society by relying on his own rational faculties. He was no radical reformer seeking to see a system swept away and replaced by a better one; but rather, he sought to present an ironic commentary of the European society of his day and its shortcomings. Thus, by providing alternatives under the cloak of fiction, More was able to sow the seeds of thought by exploring serious topics in an interesting way, using the tools of language he knew so well and took such delight in: irony, wit, and satire.

While this mastery of words allowed him to go beyond his time and leave a legacy for future generations, upon closer analysis of the text, it becomes apparent that More has also included sizeable snippets of himself. It is true that he downplays the importance of his own character in *Utopia* and allows Hythloday to narrate his tale, but naturally it is More's intellect and hand that polish Hythloday's captivating words. There are many instances in which we can discern, though admittedly by implication, images of More's own character. Throughout the novel there are many such instances although I shall limit myself only to three, which are mentioned practically at the outset.

Firstly, there is the value he places on friendship, and in this case that of his close friend Peter Giles: "he is so open, trustworthy, loyal and affectionate that it would be hard to find another friend like him anywhere."[58] Secondly, he shows his interest in scholarly matters through the words of Peter Giles: "… no man alive today can tell you so much about unknown peoples and lands; and I know that you're always greedy for such information."[59] The third instance rests in the tremendous love and affection he feels for his family and the emotional anguish of having to be so far away from them: "the ardent desire I felt to see … my wife and

[57] Roston 19.
[58] More, *Utopia* 4.
[59] More, *Utopia* 4.

my children (from whom I had been separated more than four months)."[60] My intention now is to take the above three instances, which echo More's nature, and develop them further in my analysis of euthanasia in *Utopia* and hopefully succeed in pointing out a common denominator. I shall be discussing the first and second instances in a somewhat knitted fashion, for they tend to overlap in content and explanation, as it will hopefully become clearer further into the text.

More was a lawyer by profession, although at first his commitment to the study of law was of an unsteady nature. Apparently, there was a time when More's father showed concern over his son's enthusiasm for a more humanist curriculum, which was being introduced at Oxford, and for which his son revealed an instant flair and burning passion.[61] He took such pleasure in writing because it helped him to organise his ideas and express them into words. John Guy refers to More's greatest skill: "his ability to debate both sides of a question … and dramatize the internal conflicts … using literary devices such as paradoxes, dialogues, or other open-ended forms to facilitate debate without a closure."[62] It was at this time that More met William Grocyn (1449-1519) who further kindled his interest in the classics and rhetoric, and who became his humanist mentor. For, up to the end of the fifteenth-century, it had practically only been Grocyn and Thomas Linacre (1460-1524) who read Greek texts in the original language, but between 1500 and 1520, there was a considerable spurt in Greek studies.

Linacre was one of the foremost humanist scholars in England, and it was on account of his unsurpassed medical knowledge that he was appointed royal physician to Henry VIII in 1509. On the advice of his court physician, the King

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[60] More, *Utopia* 4.

[61] The focus on academic study had veered towards the moral and political philosophy of such erudite thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Seneca, among others. The vast corpus of ancient writings was made more readily available because of the printing-press which had been brought to England in roughly the same year that More was born. Printing allowed humanists to adopt the dialogue form, as previously used by Plato, as the main vehicle for the transmission of ideas. See W. E. Campbell, *Erasmus, Tyndale and More*, (London: Spottiswoode, 1949) 87 and John Guy, *Thomas More*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 24.

[62] Guy 26.

founded the Royal College of Physicians in 1518 to control whoever practised as a physician in London and so protect the public from quacks. Linacre, who was widely travelled and a most learned and experienced physician, became an intimate friend to More, and being the intellectually curious men that they were, I wonder if there was never occasion for them to discuss such matters that concern physicians, like, for example, disease, physical and metal incapacities, terminal illness and death.

Dean of St Paul's Cathedral and founder of St Paul's School in London, John Colet (1467-1519) was one of the principal Christian Humanists of his day. At Oxford, he presented lectures on the New Testament, Erasmus being among his audience. Besides being a famous lecturer and preacher, Colet was also a pioneer of the Reformation in England, and it may well be possible that, irritated by obvious abuses and not seeing how far the reaction would go, used language on certain points which in the light of after-events is regrettable, but there can be no doubt as to his own orthodoxy and devotion.[63] Curiously, just like More's spiritual mentor, Colet manifested regret at having written certain words, More himself would also lament having written *Utopia*.

Bound under the spell of Renaissance humanism, Erasmus, like More, was a son of his time, and it would only be a matter of occasion before the paths of these two great men would cross. Erasmus has been described by many prestigious academics as being somewhat enigmatic, for he was at once bitterly anti-clerical and yet deeply religious. His brilliant intellectualism is thus described: "[interwoven with the] elegance and simplicity of an artist who had moreover the genius of improvisation."[64] Erasmus could best be described as a man of deep convictions and owner of a totally independent spirit. The fact that he would yoke himself to his work with such pleasure and enthusiasm is but a further

[63] Although there are unquestionably many worthy academics I could indicate for further reading on Colet and his influences, I have found the following text quite succinct and pleasurable: E. E. Reynolds, *Thomas More and Erasmus* (London: Oates, 1965). 24-33.
[64] Léon-E Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, trans. John Tonkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 269.

characteristic which coincided with More's own personality. Indeed, the two must have had endless profound discussions about the most varied of matters. Perhaps, one such issue could have been death: "his [Erasmus] idea of death brought together pagan wisdom and Christian hope. Socrates was his model, the Stoics his masters, it is true, but he never forgot that, in the face of death, a life given to God is the greatest of securities."[65] More and Erasmus knew Seneca's writings, for instance, which are riddled with references to honourable death. Halkin explains that: "the philosophy of the ancients had taught him [Erasmus] that it was suitable to die with dignity, the philosophy of Christ had convinced him that he must die in hope."[66]

In *Utopia*, just as Peter Giles and More sat in the lovely garden listening to Hythloday with such voracious curiosity, would it be overly fantastical to imagine More seated in the company of his friends enjoying the pleasures of enlightened and agreeable conversation? It is known how fond More was of his garden, and what better delightful setting? Would it be horribly erroneous of me to speculate that they might have eventually discussed such matters as terminal illness and self-inflicted death? Could they not have spoken about many of the problems of hygiene and health that plagued England at the time? It is quite likely that they did. Certainly, history seems to help cement this hypothesis. For instance, in 1496 there was an outbreak of syphilis, which spread throughout the whole of Europe, and women who were infected found themselves being segregated by the general population. In 1485, there was an outbreak of the 'sweating sickness' followed by another again in 1508. Since medieval times, there had been a series of measures to clean London up.[67]

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[65] Halkin 274. It ought not to be forgotten that Socrates committed suicide.
[66] Halkin 274.
[67] One such measure was the 1309 City of London Regulation, which prohibited the casting of filth from houses into the streets and lanes of the city. Throughout the Black Death pandemic (recurring on three separate occasions between 1348 to 1368) further rules were passed in the hopes of improving conditions of hygiene. In 1371, it was forbidden to slaughter oxen, sheep and swine in the City of London, and the building of any more kilns was prohibited because of the stink and badness of air, and because of the detriment it brought upon fruit trees. Although such laws had already been implemented by More's time, sadly, they were not always carried through.

Yet again, More takes a jab at English society in *Utopia* because it is the slaves who do the slaughtering in "designated places outside the city, where running water can carry away all the blood and refuse … they [Utopians] don't allow anything dirty or filthy to be brought into the city lest the air become tainted by putrefaction and thus infectious."[68] Despite attempts to the contrary, the river Thames remained obscenely polluted. In *Utopia*, the river Anyder that flows through the city of Amaurot is reminiscent of the Thames, but unlike the Thames, which in More's time reeked of filth, the Anyder does not: "as it runs past the city, the water is always fresh, and when the tide ebbs, the water runs clean and sweet all the way to the sea."[69] Finally, in 1513, there was another plague epidemic which claimed the lives of many English. These are but some of the issues which must have concerned men like More and Linacre, and they would surely have discussed such matters.[70]

Indeed, Roper refers to an episode in which the sweating sickness plagued More's own household:

> God showed, as it seemed, a manifest miraculous token of his special favor towards him, at such time as my wife, as many other that year were, was sick of the sweating sickness. Who, lying in so great extremity, of that disease as by no invention or devices that physicians in such cases commonly use (of whom she had divers both expert, wise, and well-learned, then continually about her) she could be kept from sleep. So that both physicians and all other there despaired of her recovery and gave her over.[71]

[68] More, *Utopia* 42.
[69] More, *Utopia* 34.
[70] A complete chronological rundown of the history of medicine in England is available at either <www.wellcome.ack.uk/> or <www.chronology.org.uk/>.
[71] Roper 212. The editors have provided a glossary in those cases where contemporary meanings are no longer current. The following explanation has been appended to the term 'sweating sickness' and it reads as follows: "A terrible epidemic disease, which swept England periodically during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and later; characterized by heavy sweating and general debility. The incidence of death was extremely high." Roper 212, footnote 5.

More was so distraught by his daughter's demise that he went off on his own to his chapel to render himself to God's mercy, whereupon he returned to the main house with the revelation that God had shown him the way: "… with tears most devoutly besought almighty God … unto whom nothing was impossible … to hear his humble petition. Where incontinent came into his mind that a clyster should be the only way to help her."[72] It is also interesting to note that more than one physician was tending to Margaret. And, despite being assumedly highly-skilled physicians, they duly welcomed More's suggestion to administer an enema: "[she] miraculously recovered, and at length again to perfect health restored."[73]

That More had knowledge of concerns tied to the world of medicine is clear. Indeed, it would only be natural at that time for most people to be familiar with rudimentary homemade remedies for mild ailments, using for example honey to rub on sores, or making tea from the young shoots of bramble bushes to treat diarrhoea.[74] More would have been familiar with such matters because of his friendship with physicians, like Linacre, and because he was so widely read. The ancient Greek and Latin texts are filled with such information, and just because he was a lawyer by profession does not mean he was not interested in other fields of learning. Quite the contrary, most of the ancient texts that he read dealt not only with Christian or philosophical doctrines, but many also addressed other engaging branches of study like medicine, astronomy and science.[75]

This curiosity about other branches of study (in this case medicine) is evident in *Utopia*. For, the Utopians have at least one copy of Dioscorides' treatise on drugs and herbs, which implies two things. Firstly, that if More

[72] Roper 212-213. The more contemporary term offered by the editors for 'clyster' is the term 'enema'.
[73] Roper 213.
[74] See <www.wellcome.ack.uk/> or <www.chronology.org.uk/>.
[75] At the risk of alienating himself from his father, who was not overly in favour of his intellectual pursuits outside those of the legal mantle, More continued to foster his profound pleasure in Greek and Latin literature. For a more detailed discussion of More's exposure to the philosophy of a humanist education, see John Guy, *Thomas More* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 21-39.

mentioned it in *Utopia*, then at the very least he had knowledge of such a book. Secondly, the Utopians, for sure, had knowledge of such matters. It is a book, which illustrates medicinal uses of herbs and drugs to alleviate pain, for instance, and it quite possibly indicates poisonous drugs. Since ancient times, there were many plants (such as hemlock) whose properties were known to be poisonous. Moreover, Herodotus, who taught Hippocrates, is mentioned as being one of the historians whose writings the Utopians have had access to: "… as for medical books … some small treatises by Hippocrates, and that summary of Galen known as *Microtechne*."[76] Galen (131-201ACE) had gained fame firstly as a surgeon to the gladiators, before being summoned to Rome as physician to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. He was a firm supporter of observation and reasoning and possibly one of the first experimental psychologists. His works in many ways came to symbolise Greek medicine to the medical scholars of Europe for the next fifteen centuries. In the mid-sixteenth century, his message that observation and investigation were required for thorough medical research began to emerge, and modern methods of such research finally arose.[77]

This assuredly helps in shedding some light on a few shady spots, as for instance what kind of medical knowledge the Utopians had. It could not have been overly primitive because those who are terminally ill and choose to end their suffering do as follows: "[they] take a potion which puts them painlessly to sleep, and frees them from life without any sensation of dying."[78] In addition, More allows the knowledge attained from classical antiquity to hold some prestige by stating that the early Utopians benefited greatly from a fortunate episode of fate: "… some Romans and Egyptians were cast ashore, and never departed."[79] Adams

[76] More, *Utopia* 58. I have already discussed the relevant contribution of both Herodotus and Hippocrates on pages 7 to 9 of this study.
[77] See also P. Prioreschi 344-345. Adams has written the following in form of a footnote: "To Hippocrates of Cos (fifth century B.C.) and Galen of Pergamus (second century A.D.) were attributed, in addition to some writings admittedly theirs, dozens of other medical treatises, which were variously translated, expanded, summarized, and combined for use sometimes as medical encyclopedias or sometimes as handbooks of medical practice." Adams 58.
[78] More, *Utopia* 60.
[79] More, *Utopia* 30.

speculates that here More is proposing that "Europeans would have had little to teach the Utopians in the way of technology or social organization."[80] It is undoubtedly a sound observation and it strengthens my conviction that the Utopians possessed fairly advanced knowledge of medicine. The ancient Egyptians are to this very day renowned for their skills in the art of embalming and the ancient Romans are infamous for the use of poisons in a one-time series of cloak-and-dagger assassinations in order to gain power.

Finally, I believe it would be worthwhile to take a peek, even if ever so briefly, into More's home and contemplate the manner in which he ran his household as well as the nature of his relationship with his loved ones. For, a man's convictions might hinge on his environment, but I believe that the haven of a loving relationship and stable family life also have a pull.

No doubt More was a rigorously religious man who found comfort in God and who governed his sizeable household with similar discipline and firmness. His children's upbringing was of the strictest religious discipline and, whatever they did, he was sure to invoke the will of God as the supreme 'commander'. None would go to bed without first going to the chapel to pray as a family and at meal times Scripture was read aloud. He did not care at all for idleness, believing that it would only create easy targets for temptation, thereby encouraging his family to resist at all costs. He believed that pain and suffering were but part and parcel of God's greater design for all Christians. Therefore, if his wife or children were in any way troubled by illness he maintained that:

> We may not look at our pleasure to go to heaven in featherbeds. It is not the way, for our Lord himself went thither with great pain and by many tribulations, which was the path wherein he walked thither. For the servant may not look to be in better case than his master.[81]

[80] Adams 30. OR More, *Utopia* 30. (Footnote by Adams but within the text of Utopia)
[81] Roper 211.

Above all, More's philosophy of education for his children was rooted in moral integrity: "… without it learning brings nothing but notorious and noteworthy infamy."[82] His children learnt to become proficient in Greek and Latin literature, mathematics, logic and philosophy, which is also the case for Utopian children: "They can study all the branches of learning."[83] More's children were expected to study the Church Fathers, St Augustine and St Jerome in particular. This tradition of classical and Christian education continued to be 'handed down' to More's own grandchildren. In *Utopia*, the reader is allowed glimpses of More's household in that the motivation which lies behind Utopian education is similar to that which he encouraged for his own family; in other words, to consider virtue, to search for the good of the soul and the body, and to bring to light that in which true happiness consists. It was a search that involved sacrifice, penitence and unconditional dedication to God, regardless of circumstance.

Yet, for Utopians, who also seek the good of the soul and the body through virtue, there is no need to continue bearing out excruciating and continuous pain if the disease is incurable. If pain removes pleasure, then it is irrational to endure such suffering. Self-inflicted death in this case is considered honourable as the invalid would be abiding by the priests' counsel and as they are bearers of God's will, it would be a holy act. This is quite contrary to the Christian doctrine of priests in More's era, because to them, suffering is part of God's greater plan for His children. For, how could God-fearing Christians go to heaven in such comfort when Jesus Himself suffered "great pain and … many tribulations?"[84] It was beyond question unthinkable.

Indeed, even if one of More's own children was ill beyond any hope whatsoever of recovery or in terrible pain, he would most likely regard it as God's will. Fortunately, Margaret managed to tear herself away from death's clutches and was restored to perfect health. Bearing in mind that

[82] Guy 74.
[83] More, *Utopia* 49.
[84] Roper 211.

the Utopians do not take fortune-telling or other superstitious methods of divination seriously although: "they venerate miracles which occur without the help of nature, considering them direct and visible manifestations of the divine power."[85] It would be worthwhile to reflect upon what Roper has to say once the scare is over. Firstly, that her recovery is hinted at falling nothing short of a miracle; a miracle, which has been worked much due to More's devoutness to God. And, secondly, "if it had pleased God at that time to have taken [Margaret] to His mercy, her father said he would never have meddled with worldly matters after."[86] Does this sound like a man who would earnestly advocate euthanasia?

2.3.3. "The Nature of a *jeu d'esprit*"[87]

Overall, academics agree that the irony and jocularity, present above all in Book Two of *Utopia*, is a feature of Renaissance humanists, and that More used this rhetorical technique more in "the nature of a *jeu d'esprit*, a humanist tract written for the delight and edification of More's scholarly friends such as Erasmus and Peter Giles."[88] Could this be another angle that ought to be contemplated, as to why More wrote *Utopia*, and by the same token, why he allowed the Utopians to practise euthanasia? Indeed, the very words upon which *Utopia* ends – "Yet I confess there are many things in the Commonwealth of Utopia that I wish our own country would imitate – though I don't really expect it will"[89] – leave the reader uncertain as to where the author's real commitment lies. More seems to

[85] More, *Utopia* 76.
[86] Roper 213. Certainly, such an incident would be scrupulously registered as being of noteworthy importance if there were any hope of securing a person's beatification and then eventual sainthood. I wonder if this was the case here. I have chosen not to include a similar analysis for Huxley and Clark here, as I feel it will be more suited at a later stage of the discussion.
[87] Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (London: Open UP, 1991) 2.
[88] Kumar 2. A good critical review of various interpretations is also available in Q. Skinner, "Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*," *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. A. Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 123-158.
[89] More, *Utopia* 85.

play hide and seek with the reader, for, *Utopia* is seen as being at once a flight of wish-fulfilling fantasy and a no-nonsense programme for social reform.

Although it is unarguably valuable to take More's humorous vein into account, it is also equally significant to consider the possibility that *Utopia* was written to enhance serious public debate on the ideal state.[90] Certainly, Utopia is everything that More's England is not. The obsessive leechlike attachment to material wealth has been thwarted by the practical abolition of private property and money, and parasitic classes the likes of slothful priests, nobles, greedy soldiers and lawyers no longer plague society. Contrary to the greater English population in More's time, Utopians can look forward to a life of organised political democracy, free from oppression, hunger and unhappiness. Melodic sounds and delightful aromas that float out from breathtakingly beautiful gardens and spotless well-planned houses have replaced the stink that oozes out from many of the cluttered, filthy and disease-ridden ones of England in the early sixteenth-century. On Utopia, there are individuals knowledgeable in the art of medicine, who minister to the ill in spacious public hospitals:

> … so that the sick, however numerous they may be, will not be packed closely and uncomfortably together, and also so those who have a contagious disease, such as might pass from one to the other, may be isolated … The hospitals are well ordered and supplied with everything needed to cure the patients, who are nursed with tender and watchful care.[91]

While this is truly visionary on More's part, it also reflects how well aware he was of the dismal state of affairs of English hospitals at that time, and how urgent it was to improve things, and certainly his professional responsibilities

[90] For more in-depth studies, see Hubertus Schulte Herbrüggen, "More's *Utopia* as a Paradigm," *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, eds. R. S. Sylvester and G. P. Marc'hadour (Connecticut: String P, 1977) 251-262. See also Edward L. Surtz, "Humanism and Communism," *Utopia*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1992) 169-181.
[91] More, *Utopia* 42.

permitted that he come into contact with such matters on a regular basis.[92] And, like any state, especially an ideal state, thought must be given to those who are unable to look after themselves because they are physically or mentally incapacitated due to illness, disability or old age. What of those who are terminally ill? Unpleasant though death might be, it is part and parcel of life. Who becomes responsible, once the onset of old age or illness becomes apparent? How should the state deal with such elementary concerns, such as old age and illness? Society as we know it to be today is still struggling (undisputedly more so) to deal with such critical problems as an ever-increasing elderly population, and astronomical government expenses on caring for the aged, the terminally ill, and those with disabilities. Of course, there are also those linked indeterminately to life-support machines or kept alive by ingesting volumes of drugs.[93]

Interestingly, the first hospices date as far back as the fourth-century, when Christians in Europe provided care not only to the dying but also to the ill and destitute. They provided places for shelter for travellers, those in need of recovery, pregnant women and the infirm. In reality, they were resting places, and like the first hospitals, usually run by a religious order. Although hospices are known to have existed in England since medieval times, back in the early sixteenth-century such issues were not concerns of great priority. More's generation grew up in a world that recognised dying as a part of living and it was quite common to have lost friends or loved ones by the age of puberty. Certainly, most people who were ill, bedridden or for some reason incapacitated were cared

[92] In 1476, one year prior to More's birth, William Caxton (*c.*1422-91) set up a printing press at Westminster. It was an event that would steer the course of English intellectualism onto bigger and greener pastures, but what I would like to refer to here is that in 1491, Caxton published *Journals of Health* which would set the pattern for future medical journals. Yet again, it is apparent that issues of a medical nature were certainly discussed, at the very least in intellectual circles.

[93] It is ironical that despite so much advanced medical technology available nowadays, more than 80 percent of the world's population continues to live without access to any of it. World Health Organisation at <www.worldhealthorganisation>.

for at home and, contrary to what commonly happens today, people died at home, possibly surrounded by their families, and not in some hospital.[94]

Judging by the blatantly dismal conditions of English hospitals, and the fear of quacks (in More's time) it could hardly be surprising therefore that most people would in all likelihood prefer to be cared for at home even if death was near by. That had been the case with More's own daughter. However, the hospitals and the highly skilled physicians on Utopia are so favourably regarded that: "though nobody is sent there [hospital] against his will, there is hardly anyone in the city who would not rather be treated for an illness at the hospital than at home."[95] Despite not possessing the same sophisticated means as the administrators of the New World state hospitals, nor having the medical know-how of the physicians caring for Ken, a Utopian is certain that he will be well cared for and that only if he so wishes it, does he have to bare pain.[96] For, should he choose not to, he has the individual free will to release himself from his painful existence. And, the interpreters of God's will assure him that his family need not fear recriminations of any sort from society, as would the family of someone in More's England, who intentionally ended his life even if he were terminally ill and in great pain. His family would, more than likely, not only be shunned by their neighbours but also have the added

[94] For an interesting succinct background reading to English medical care, see Richard A. Wright, *Human Values in Health Care* (New York: McGraw, 1987) 12-22. In 1106, the Priory was founded near the Church of St Mary, London and although it separated from the Church in 1215, it continued to be overseen by a religious order. Today, the Priory is a very expensive private hospital for people who wish to receive treatment for their problems with drugs and alcohol. A further interesting curiosity is that the first Royal Charter of the Barbers Guild (1462) was concerned with the treatment of the ill and hurt by outward applications. Although functions were restricted to the City of London and one mile around, its radius was to be extended later on.

[95] More, *Utopia* 42.

[96] I would like to add that in regards to the references made to the Utopian 'man' certainly no offence has been intended, and I duly apologise if it has been thus understood. It is simply that I have preferred to avoid the cumbersomeness and clumsiness of continually referring to both sexes, when evidently both are intended.

burden of having a member of the family seen as the greatest of all sinners – a heretic.[97]

Yet, More advocates euthanasia in *Utopia*! And he does so notwithstanding the high esteem he has for the Early Fathers, who in bygone times had helped bring to an end the fanaticism of early Christians hungry for martyrdom. Many of St Augustine's writings, which More stipulated his own children should read, clearly and strongly condemn self-inflicted death, regardless of circumstance. Indeed, this Early Father had been quite clear that in no way could life be cut short by a man's own hand because life was God-given and a man's suffering was preordained. The manner in which a man endured his pain and torment was important above all else. For, fundamentally, it would determine the nobility of his soul. Suicide was thus equated to scorning God's love and will.[98]

Interestingly, on Utopia a man is free to choose euthanasia, and he has the blessing to do so from priests, without any recrimination from society, should he be confronted with intolerable suffering. However, mindless suicide tells another tale.

> When death is advised by the authorities, they consider self-destruction honorable. But the suicide, who takes his own life without the approval of priests and senate, they consider unworthy either of earth or fire, and throw his body, unburied and disgraced, into the nearest bog.[99]

Utopians are quite free to choose the religious faith they wish to follow for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, it is in the interest of peace, and secondly, it is

[97] Pages 27 to 31 deal more directly with the issues of euthanasia and suicide in the Middle Ages, which is also relevant in this discussion of euthanasia and the Renaissance Thomas More, for the cultures and traditions of both eras overlap. The issues of euthanasia and suicide in the Renaissance are dealt with on pages 31 to 37.
[98] See pages 24 to 27 of this study.
[99] More, *Utopia* 60.

in the interest of religion itself. While King Utopus has permitted religious tolerance on the one hand, on the other he imposes a condition:

> The only exception he made was a positive and strict law against any person who should sink so far below the dignity of human nature as to think that the soul perishes with the body, or that the universe is ruled by mere chance, rather than divine providence.[100]

These words seem to resound those of St Augustine's. It can hardly be surprising therefore that the Utopians of More's creation should heap such scorn on the very notion of suicide. For, to inflict death upon oneself is to scorn God Himself.

A further interesting particularity is the amount of consideration that More places on the manner of dying. I have already referred to More's quasi-obsessional belief that a life of resistance to temptation, toil and suffering was sure to place a worthy Christian on the path to salvation. And his emphasis on cheerful dying, which is quite humanist in character, is unmistakeably visible in the description of the attitude that Utopians have to death and dying:

> Almost all the Utopians are absolutely convinced that man's bliss after death will be enormous and eternal; thus they lament every man's sickness, but mourn over a death only if the man was torn from life despairingly and against his will. Such behaviour they take to be a very bad sign, as if the soul, being in anguish and conscious of guilt, dreaded death through a secret premonition of punishments to come … God can hardly be well pleased with the coming of one who, when he is summoned, does not come gladly, but is dragged off reluctantly and against his will.[101]

[100] More, *Utopia* 74-75.
[101] More, *Utopia* 75-76.

In other words, a man who accepts his death with open arms and the cheeriest of dispositions, however painful and unpleasant it may be, is looked upon with respect and admiration and when the time comes, others do not mourn for him. Rather, the body is carried cheerfully away to the sound of singing, entrusting the dead man's soul to God. His cremation, though a solemn act, is more one of respect and admiration than one of deep mourning. In fact, once the funeral is over they go home and talk about his character and his feats, and the manner of his joyful death is readily discussed with happiness. More held that death was not to be feared, for God predestined it and it was His will whether or not we suffered before the soul left the body. It is a belief which is readily reflected in *Utopia*, because someone who receives death with so much lamentation, fear and reluctance is looked upon with "horror, and they carry away the corpse to the cemetery in melancholy silence."[102]

Yet again, why does More write a book concerning the best state of a commonwealth in which euthanasia is practised but suicide is scorned? Perhaps More has allowed for euthanasia to be practised as it offers a stark contrast to the condemnation of suicide. I believe that this is satire at its best. Pagan Utopians who are suffering some terrible disease or who are terminally ill have the possibility to be cared for by highly skilled physicians, and to receive the best medical and human care possible in hospitals that are worthy of the name. In More's England, the same does not take place. The final word in Book Two on religion draws attention to the pressing spiritual and ecclesiastical problems at the threshold of the Reformation: "More did not mean that Heathendom is better than Christianity. He meant that some Christians are worse than heathen."[103] A Christian worthy of God's grace in heaven had to be willing to endure all that God had reserved for him on earth, and he had to be willing to accept it with a cheerful countenance, regardless of any amount of suffering or sacrifice which had to be

[102] More, *Utopia* 75-76.
[103] Chambers, R. W., "The Meaning of Utopia," *Utopia*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1992) 140.

borne. Perhaps, More was taking a jab at those men of the cloth who had become idle, neurotically greedy and who were unwilling to show God their love and devotion through personal sacrifice.

Therefore, if the English criticise the Utopians, they criticise no one else but themselves. Surtz purports that the English are equally guilty of rationalising and justifying corrupt means to a supposedly acceptable end. He argues further:

> [their collective religion] shadows forth many reforms needed in the Church: clerical sanctity, reverence in church, simple music, joyful resignation to death, etc. All is ready for triumphant fulfilment in Christ and Christianity. Contemporary humanists would have grasped this fact immediately.[104]

Still, on one side of the fence stand the defenders of euthanasia, who throughout the ages have stubbornly insisted that More is in fact advocating its practice. On the other side stand those who, just as stubbornly, argue that he is doing nothing of the sort.[105]

Lets for a moment step back and mentally erase the invisible umbilical cord that ties us to the age in which we are living, so as to comprehend better a distant past, when different standards and ideals scurried about in English minds. Lets also take into account what has been said of More thus far – the dedicated family man, the scrupulously upright professional, the trustworthy friend, the saint – can it in all honesty be argued that More was in any way advocating euthanasia? Perhaps, the whole problem can be summed up, though somewhat ironically, in one word – Utopia. It is a word, which has been crammed with so much meaning that it may have become misleading. Today, it is regarded as 'the ideal state' or 'the perfect state'. Yet, to More it simply meant 'no place'. Reynolds believes that

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[104] Surtz, Edward, S. J, introduction, *Utopia*, By Thomas More (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964) xxiii.
[105] This of course leaves me in somewhat of a predicament, and the real question ought to be how exactly it is that I came to be on top of such a narrow strip of barbed wire. Indeed, the euthanasia debate can simultaneously be so emotionally and intellectually stirring that it tends to leave one feeling thus.

many people have been induced into thinking that every triviality in the Utopian way of life was part of More's design of the ideal community. He states that:

> … the book is critical of contemporary society and the emphasis is not so much on the polity and economy of Utopia as on the contrast with the existing state of affairs … we must read the criticism of society in the description of Utopia … It is, in fact, uncritical to take the book too seriously … he [More] used Utopia as what it really is, a playground. His Utopia was partly a joke, but since his time, Utopians have seldom seen the joke.[106]

The truth of the matter is that when *Utopia* came out, many people believed every word of it. They took it literally. Adams speculates: "Partly this was the result of More's straight-faced narrative technique; partly also it was the result of an informal, improvised conspiracy."[107] In reading some of the correspondence that was exchanged among a few of the humanists of northern Europe, it becomes apparent that there was some interest in keeping up, what Adams calls, the "hoax". Indeed, it may be deduced from the letter Peter Giles wrote to Jerome Busleiden in which he comes up with a wonderfully wry explanation as to why both he and More are uncertain as to the exact location of the island.[108] In that same letter, Giles even goes as far as making up a special Utopian alphabet. Certainly, More took great delight in such playfulness and he too joined in the fun:

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[106] Reynolds 120.

[107] Robert M. Adams, ed., "The Humanist Circle: Letters," *Utopia*, by Sir Thomas More, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1992) 108.

[108] This letter, which is dated 1 November 1516, has been reproduced in the 1992 Norton edition of *Utopia*, 112-115. The explanation that Giles provides as to why he is somewhat hazy as to the whereabouts of the island of Utopia is quite amusing. At the exact moment that Hythloday is revealing its geographical position, More just happens to have a servant whispering some message in his ear and so does not hear, and Giles is unable to hear because someone just happens to cough extra loudly at that moment. It is quite common and actually popular nowadays to use this technique of chance events and coincidences in light comedies.

> Well, if these doubters won't believe such witnesses, let them consult Hythloday himself, for he is not yet dead. I heard only recently from some travelers coming out of Portugal that on the first of last March he was as healthy and vigorous a man as he ever was.[109]

There was supposedly a man who, after having read *Utopia*, wished to be sent to the island of Utopia as a missionary. If indeed it is true, then More must have had a grand old time laughing about it. He was able to joke whilst bearing such a serious face that even those who knew him best, his own family and friends, were sometimes left puzzled. Therefore, it ought not to be surprising that his love of a joke, his sense of humour, his wit and his knowledge and appreciation of ancient satire extend themselves into *Utopia*. Elliott sees *Utopia* as a clear sign of the influence of More's delight in Lucian, who was one of his favourite authors: "The Latin satirists were part of the literary ambiance in which More moved most freely; he often quotes from them, and it is clear that he had given a good deal of thought to certain problems having to do with satire as a form."[110] Indeed, the satirical elements throughout *Utopia* are quite manifest. The Utopians, like More, take pleasure in fools and their perception of the satiric is for instance to make their chamber pots, as well as the chains round the necks of slaves, out of gold. One of the most famous definitions of satire is that of Swift. "Satire," he wrote, "is a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own, which is the chief reason for that kind of reception it meets in the world, and that so very few are offended with it."[111] *Utopia* is such a looking glass – a looking glass which would allow More's contemporaries to see the reflection of their own virtues and vices.

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[109] This was taken from a letter More sent to Giles. Adams, "The Humanist Circle: Letters" 125.
[110] Robert C. Elliott, "The Shape of *Utopia*," *Utopia*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1992) 185.
[111] Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) Irish-born Anglican Irish priest who became a poet and satirist in London. He is best remembered for his novel *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). This quote is found in the "Preface" to *The Battle of the Books* taken from *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Quotations* (Bloomsbury: London, 1987) 339.

In keeping with this analogy, it might also be said that *Brave New World* allowed Huxley's contemporaries to peer into a looking glass, which had remarkable and almost prophetic qualities. What had started out apparently as a little leg pulling, at the expense of H.G. Wells, turned out to be more than Huxley had bargained for as he became caught up in the excitement of his own ideas. *Brave New World* developed into something much more profound and gripping than a simple satirical account of the dehumanising effect which science, back then at the very outset of the 1930s, seemed likely to have on society. Huxley certainly had an uncanny knack for zeroing in on the anxieties of the moment. For, the looking glass within *Brave New World* reflects the deep waters in which Britain found itself in 1931, as does it reflect Huxley's concerns after a visit he had just paid to the United States the previous year. He envisaged the possibility of writing a satire on what he came across: "The thing which is happening in America is a revaluation of values," wrote Huxley, "a radical alteration (for the worse) of established standards."[112] Indeed, all the pressing problems that this novel addresses are no less pressing in the present day and age.

Overall, academics agree that the main theme of Huxley's counter Utopia portrays the conflict between the individual and society. It is a society which he views with much pessimism and thus he presents it as a kind of satire, for he has created a futuristic society whose shortcomings and evils he exposes. But, *Brave New World* is not only satirical in nature, because it also displays ambiguous characteristics: human beings solve their problems by bringing their humanity to an end. In essence, what Huxley feared was that:

> … you could dominate people by social, educational and pharmaceutical arrangements … iron them into a kind of uniformity, if you were able to manipulate their genetic background … if you had a government sufficiently unscrupulous you could do these things without any doubt.[113]

[112] Aldous Huxley, *America and the Future* (Austin: Pemberton, 1970) 17.
[113] Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography 1894-1939*, vol. 1 (London: Chatto, 1973) 245.

"These things" that he feared are: the total centralisation of power, an infallible method of standardising the human product, the Pavlovian conditioning of children before and after they are born, hypnopaedia, mind manipulating drugs, sexual promiscuity, mandatory contraceptives, the prolongation of youth and euthanasia. He feared that "these things" could turn into reality if society did not take the necessary precautions. In his *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) written nearly thirty years later, Huxley examined the progress of his prophecies against reality and reasoned that many of his fictional fantasies had grown disquietingly close to the truth: "This is possible: for heaven's sake be careful about it."[114]

Like More, Huxley resorted to the literary technique of satire to draw attention to the lurking dangers within society, and, wrapped up snugly within satire, lies humour. Indeed, despite the grimness that skulks about in *Brave New World*, there are quite a few occasions in which it is unavoidable to hold back a snort or two. One such moment is when Lenina takes the Savage out to a 'feely' and the whole episode is graphically described. Another is when the Director of Hatcheries shows his strict observance of social 'etiquette' by giving Lenina a playful tap on the bottom as he walks past.[115]

There is no shortage of satirical elements in *Brave New World* as is the case with *Utopia*; all the reader needs to do is to contemplate as scrupulously as possible the image within the looking glass they have been provided with and, sure enough, the creases, the wrinkles, the blemishes and all the other signs of wear and tear that modern society has to bear gradually become apparent. There will of course always be those who will gaze perpetually and see nothing out of place, partly because they have been conditioned not to and partly because they could not care less. More certainly saw it, as did Huxley. They saw the

[114] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Vintage, 1994) 150.
[115] These two instants may be found on pages 150 to 153 and page 13 respectively of *Brave New World*. Huxley's wit and sense of humour is also manifest in the transformation of the sedate and demure Athenaeum, to which all the Huxleys belonged, into the Aphroditaeum. The Athenaeum was a club in London for people of literary, scientific and artistic attainments, patrons of learning and so forth.

disorderliness of their contemporary societies and ached for order to be re-established.

Huxley feared that individual freedom, as well as the desire for such freedom, was beginning to dwindle and that in some parts of the world the flame of freedom had either already gone out or was clearly about to. The imminent danger of the loss of individual voices is that greedy and ambitious rulers will yield to temptations – the same dangerous temptations that More also speaks of. For this is what happens when people are tempted for far too long or too seductively – they generally fall into temptation. How might this be related to the issue of euthanasia in *Brave New World*?

The answer lies in Huxley's incessant concern with overpopulation:

> Overpopulation leads to economic insecurity and social unrest … unrest and insecurity lead to more control by central governments and an increase of their power … this increased power will probably be exercised in a dictatorial fashion.[116]

In the New World state, the ideal number for world population has been calculated and has been thus maintained through the careful and artificial control of births and deaths. No longer is it nature that dictates when life begins and ends. Nor is there any freedom of choice in how to live those sixty 'programmed' years. There is no priest to offer sage counsel or comfort, instead: "there is always soma, delicious soma, half a gramme for a half holiday, a gramme for a weekend, two grammes for a trip to the gorgeous East."[117]

In his *Brave New World Revisited*, Huxley writes: "The nightmare of total organization, which I had situated in the seventh century after Ford, has emerged from the safe, remote future and is now awaiting us, just around the next

[116] Huxley, *World Revisited* 13.
[117] Huxley, *World* 49.

corner."[118] By the same token, the euthanasia movement, which had been picking up momentum at the time *Brave New World* was being written, was yet again rearing its head by the late 1950s. There had been a short period of dormancy due to the vexatious years of the Second World War. It is important not to overlook the Nazi's somewhat detrimental and misplaced application of euthanasia during this period, because it cast a dark shadow over the movement to legalise it (and continues to do so to this day). It is this "dictatorial fashion" Huxley is warning society against. There is a danger of society becoming so uniform, so conditioned and so artificial that it no longer wonders where humanity has gone and people no longer have the ability to question the human experiences of life and death. Then there is the real danger that no one will question the 'practical' and 'rational' solution to unproductive members of society – the infirm, the terminally ill, the disabled and the elderly – a handy source of phosphorous. Huxley's satirical tone echoes throughout: "Youth almost impaired till sixty, and then, crack! the end."[119] This is the presentation of death in *Brave New World.* It is premeditated, detached of sentiment, bureaucratic and economically viable. Free will has vanished. It leaves a chilling image in the looking glass.

In considering Shakespeare's words that the world is but a stage,[120] could it not by the same token be said that the stage is a manifestation of the world? One of the many spellbinding properties of the stage is its capacity to reflect the social moods and intellectual inclinations of an era. In essence, *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* is a looking glass too. For, it tells the tale of one man, whose struggle to have the right to exercise his free will and choose his own demise could at any given moment be our own. Indeed, it is jarring, precisely because it is conceivable.

Clark has not remained indifferent to the literary techniques of satire, wit and humour in *Whose Life Is It Anyway?.* He uses humour (though somewhat dark

[118] Huxley, *World Revisited* 4.
[119] Huxley, *World* 99.
[120] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed., Stanley Wells *et. al.*, *William Shakespeare. The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2005) 661.

at times) quite proficiently as a means of breaking up some of the more serious dialogue, and so the play is not left overemotional. But Clark also uses black comedy to secure other results, for it is a form of drama which displays a marked disillusionment and cynicism. It usually shows human beings without convictions and with little hope, regulated by fate or incomprehensible powers – in fact, human beings in an 'absurd' predicament. Certainly, this is the case with Ken, as he is portrayed as being a man of wit and intelligence who, under other circumstances might have proven to be an invaluable asset to society. Ironically, society allows him to choose otherwise. The ensuing result is a stomach wrenching dose of ambiguous emotions and a dark brew of unanswered questions, which is equally ironic, for the play's very title is presented as a question. And, instead of having an answer by the end of the play, the audience has far more questions than at the outset.

At its darkest, such humour is pervaded by a kind of sour despair: we can't do anything, so we may as well laugh. The wit is mordant and the humour sardonic. *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* opens with these very elements of black humour:

> KEN. Hello, I'm afraid I can't offer you my hand. You'll just have to make do with my backside like all the other nurses.
>
> …
>
> KEN. It's funny you know. I used to dream of situations like this.
>
> SISTER. Being injured?
>
> KEN. No! Lying on a bed being massaged by two beautiful women.
>
> SISTER. *(mock serious)*: If you go on like this Mr Harrison I shan't be able to send my young nurses in here.
>
> KEN. They're perfectly safe with me, Sister.[121]

[121] Clark 1.

Ken knows only full well that he is permanently paralysed from the neck down and that it is highly unlikely that he will arouse sexual response in anyone, either physically or emotionally. At best, he will arouse only pity and sympathy. He knows also the discomfort and uneasiness that is felt by most people when confronted by someone who is physically 'different'. Indeed, how do we greet someone who is quadriplegic? Shaking hands seems to be out of the question, so Ken offers his backside.[122] Just how threatening can such a man be to young nurses? Sitting safely in the audience, it is possible to sneak a chuckle, and very often we are so caught up in the magical world of theatre that we forget 'our place' and spontaneously snort out loudly. But, the looking glass before us tells us more. It tells us just how psychologically ill prepared society is to confront such awkward and unsettling moments.

Thus, in a bid to mock, Clark uses dark humour. Sardonic comment shows both lack of respect for what someone else has said or done and it is also sometimes used to alleviate. It is what Clark does in order to highlight the underlying battle between the authoritative medical figure of Dr Emerson and Ken:

> KEN. You mean you only grow the vegetables here – the
> vegetable store is somewhere else.
> DR EMERSON. I don't think I understand you.[123]

In this particular scene, humour helps to put Ken's personality (in keeping with theatre jargon) under the spotlight. His intelligence and wit manifest themselves through his jokes, which might even be classified by some as 'sick

[122] Many outdated attitudes towards people with physical or mental disabilities have begun to change, although blind discrimination is still at large. According to the International Committee of BCODP – an organisation which struggles to ensure the rights of people with disabilities – over 80% of people with disabilities are not born with their impairment but acquire it. Of those who have an impairment at birth, many of these are not genetically determined (BCODP available at <http://www.bcodp.org.uk/>).
[123] Clark 11.

jokes'. In the 20th century, dark humour or what is sometimes known as the 'sick joke' became particularly predominant. For Clark, it presented itself as a worthy vehicle to transport an otherwise weighty issue – euthanasia.

2.4. "The Interruption of Our Pleasures"[124]

It was Seneca who wrote that: "There are three things upsetting about any illness: the fear of dying, the physical suffering and the interruption of our pleasures."[125] It is with these words of the Stoic philosopher as my bedrock that I shall now attempt to draw a parallel with Utopian attitudes towards those who are ill.

Life on the philosophical island of Utopia is likened to that of on an idealised intellectual paradise. Although this may in many ways be regarded as the perfect society, in which intellectual pursuit reigns supreme (with respect to moral philosophy and religious principles) the Utopians dispute many things, among which are things that are good for the body and the mind, the nature of virtue and pleasure and the source of man's happiness. The last is their chief concern, and the dispute always includes some religious views, which they deem necessary for happiness. Utopians hold arguments and practise doctrines similar to those of Christians. While they value virtue and pleasure:

> … their chief concern is human happiness, and whether it consists of one thing or many. They seem overly inclined to the view of those who think that all or most human happiness consists of pleasure. And what is more surprising, they seek support for this hedonistic philosophy from their religion, which is serious and strict, indeed, almost stern and forbidding.[126]

[124] Seneca LXXVII: 132.
[125] Seneca LXXVII: 132.
[126] More *Utopia* 50.

The religious principles of the Utopians are such that the soul of man is considered to be immortal, and through God's compassion it is born for happiness. After this life, He appoints us with rewards for our virtues and good deeds, but punishes us for our sins. Although these principles of religion are passed down through tradition, they can also be established through reason. Two assumptions have to be made. Firstly, greater pleasures are sought after more than lesser pleasures, and secondly, no pleasure should be sought if it brings pain: "avoid pleasures that are inevitably followed by pain."[127] However, happiness can only be found in pleasurable things that are also good and honest. The Utopian definition of virtue is the following: "living according to nature; and God, they say, created us to that end. When a man obeys the dictates of reason in choosing one thing and avoiding another, he is following nature."[128] Such is the Utopians' philosophical outlook on life – hedonistic.

Hedonism is the belief that the reason for living is to enjoy life, therefore, the best life is one, which provides the most pleasure. A good life would be having as much pleasure as possible and as little pain as possible. Consequently (and very simplistically of course), pleasure is a *natural good* whereas pain is a *natural evil*. It is essential to point out that pleasure and pain stand manifestly apart from such concepts as honour and disgrace. Unlike pleasure and pain, honour and disgrace differ from culture to culture, and are highly dependent upon the customs and practices of particular eras and places. While two societies might quite readily see eye-to-eye that pain is unpleasant and undesirable, they might be unwilling to agree on the attitudes to take in regards the treatment or termination of unbearable pain, as is the case with euthanasia.[129]

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[127] More, *Utopia* 50.
[128] More, *Utopia* 51.
[129] So, for instance whilst Harakiri (the traditional act of committing suicide by cutting the stomach open with a knife or sword) may be regarded as an honourable way out of a disgraceful situation in Japanese culture (although it is no longer legal), it is looked upon in horror by English culture. Yet, both cultures would readily agree that a cancerous tumour is painful, thus allowing for the possible conclusion that the world of *natural* values remains constant.

Following on from this philosophical perspective on life, it would seem only logical that a Utopian who is suffering some terrible terminal illness, and is unable to partake in any of life's pleasures should choose to end his life. After careful deliberation, should that man reach the conclusion that the world is simply a prison cell then, "he should not hesitate to free himself … from the rack of living."[130] Furthermore, his soul will not perish and neither will his family nor his memory be ostracised by others, because his act will have been done with the blessing of priests. It is this trust in reason alone (without the advantage of Christian revelation) that allows the Utopians to approve of social measures like divorce and euthanasia, which would otherwise be regarded as radical and certainly heretical by those in the early sixteenth-century. To the Utopians, it is more a matter of *natural good* victorious over *natural evil*.

To Hythloday, the Utopians' understanding of Christianity is flawed because they do not have access to the Scriptures and: "they still lack those sacraments which in our religion can be administered only by priests."[131] The constraints of their moral code lead them to assume that acts like divorce and euthanasia, which would be mortal sins, certainly in Renaissance Catholic eyes, are in fact pious and honourable. According to Herbrüggen:

> Utopian ideality is founded not in their religion but in the *ethics* of their citizens. For it is not the sphere of religious and metaphysical ties between man and godhead, but the sphere of *natural* ethical behaviour of the Utopians founded on reason which prompts their actions and serves as a foundation of their thriving public institutions.[132]

However, it is not blind reason alone that guides the Utopians in their search for happiness, because they also recognise the need for faith. Fox

[130] More, *Utopia* 60.
[131] More, *Utopia* 73.
[132] Herbrüggen 255. Fox 55.

speculates that in regards to their morality, More granted the Utopians this way of life because he would have liked to have lived that way, but was unable to:

> Nothing would have pleased him more than to have been able to be a married priest, or to have gratified his five senses with the harmless pleasures that grace, for example, Utopian meals; but although desire inclined him towards them, other forces in his personality caused him to withhold the assent of his will to them.[133]

Indeed, Herbrüggen's is one perspective, but on a reader's first encounter it would seem that the Utopians run a very tight ship. Everything that happens, no matter how apparently irrelevant, appears to be scrupulously controlled.[134] One such instance is when a man wishes to visit a neighbouring town, he must request special permission: "They travel together in groups, taking a letter from the prince granting leave to travel and fixing a day of return."[135] A Utopian's movements are to be monitored at all times. Another instance involves the distribution of food, because only once the bedridden lying in the hospitals or at home have been served do those in the halls have their meals: "When the hospital steward has received the food prescribed for the sick by their doctors, the rest is fairly divided among the halls according to the number in each."[136] It is only rational that if such a well-knit organisation is to run smoothly then everything must be accounted for.

Utopians are encouraged to be rational for it avoids any brash decisions, which could have detrimental consequences. With that specific ideal in mind, rules have been drawn up to ensure that motions are deliberate and well-thought out. Indeed, one of their greatest rules is never to debate an issue on the same day that it is proposed:

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[133] Fox 55.
[134] However, in his article "More's Utopia as a Paradigm," Herbrüggen goes on to propose that as Utopians behave according to reason, they naturally obey the state's rules, which in turn do not need to be enforced on anyone. 256-257.
[135] More, *Utopia* 44.
[136] More, *Utopia* 42. Instances such as these have led many thinkers, amongst others, to speculate that More is in fact promoting, deceptively so, the ideal of a communist state.

> The senate has a standing rule never to discuss a matter on the same day when it was first introduced; all new business is deferred to the next meeting. They do this so that a man will not blurt out the first thought that occurs to him, and then devote all his energies to defending those foolish impulses, instead of considering impartially the public good.[137]

I do not believe that it would be overly farfetched to speculate that a Utopian suffering tremendous pain might not blurt out at any given moment his desire to die, despite the knowledge that the ill and those with physical disabilities are not cast out but rather are very well cared for. Likewise, it might be equally acceptable to presume that those who happened to be standing nearby would not immediately set about carrying out such wishes, because, yet again, it would not be regarded as reasonable. Contrarily: "Everything is done to mitigate the pain of those who are suffering incurable diseases; and visitors do their best to console them by sitting and talking with them."[138] Before any decision is reached, whether or not euthanasia is reasonable and thereby appropriate, there must first be discussion but only when heads are clear. Furthermore, only priests have the authority to reach such decisions, which are founded on this reason: "since for him death puts an end, not to pleasure, but to agony."[139] In view of the fact that their whole existence is geared towards finding happiness, then, if suffering serves as an impediment to that end, there is a certain reason to the argument in favour of euthanasia. Moreover, it cannot be overlooked that Utopians believe in an afterlife and that rewards are appointed for their virtues and deeds of good. Yet again, and in view of Utopian philosophy, if suffering is seen as a hindrance not only to

[137] More, *Utopia* 36.
[138] More, *Utopia* 60. The reader is never allowed the privilege of hearing any actual words uttered by a Utopian, and thus, is limited to hearsay. It should be noted, therefore, that possible topics of conversation can only be guessed at. If their interest in intellectual pursuits and their sense of reason are anything to go by, it can be speculated that they would possibly discuss such matters in which they would take delight as well as matters of a more practical nature, such as the immediate physical well-being of a fellow Utopian who happened to find himself ill or bedridden.
[139] More, *Utopia* 60.

pleasure but also to the fulfilment of virtues and good deeds whilst in life, then euthanasia can only be regarded as praiseworthy.

Hythloday informs the reader that the Utopians had knowledge of the Roman civilisation, and it has already been established that the Romans spoke at great length about the important relationship between physical and mental well-being. Indeed, *Utopia* echoes Seneca throughout and in the matter of pleasures it could not be any truer:

> Pleasures, moreover, are of two kinds. The physical pleasures are the ones which illness interferes with, though it does not do away with them altogether – indeed, if you take a true view of the matter, they are actually sharpened by illness, a man deriving greater pleasure from drinking something when he is thirsty and finding food all the more welcome through being hungry, anything set before one after one has had to fast being greeted with a heightened appetite. But no doctor can refuse his patient those other, greater and surer pleasures, the pleasures of the mind and spirit.[140]

It is interesting that these very words seem to echo in *Utopia*, particularly in the following: "As for eating and drinking … they consider these bodily pleasures desirable … for the sake of health … as ways to withstand the insidious attacks of sickness."[141] The Utopians prefer the pleasures of the mind to those of the body, but it is striking how much attention More gives to the latter.[142] All pleasures are ranked accordingly to express the objective principles of the community and individual deviation is not allowed. Pleasures of the soul feature at the top of the hierarchy and below are those of bodily pleasures, which in turn are divided into two groups. The first of these is pleasure of the

[140] Seneca LXXVIII: 137-139.
[141] More, *Utopia* 55.
[142] Fox is of the opinion that More permits the Utopians a privilege he would never have permitted himself in his own life: "to explore the implications of an assumption that virtue and pleasure *are* compatible … after having Hythlodaeus utter a discreet disclaimer against it, he gives a serious and coherent praise of pleasure" (Fox 54).

senses. For instance, upon listing the sensual pleasures, the following are included: "when we move our bowels" and "relieve an itch somewhere by rubbing or scratching it."[143] Second, comes the pleasure of being perfectly healthy, which the Utopians regard as the basis of all other joys of life: "health itself, when undisturbed by pain, gives pleasure … many consider this to be the greatest pleasure of all … pain is the bitter enemy of pleasure, while disease is the enemy of health … pleasure must be inherent in quiet good health."[144]

Relieving an itch or voiding excrement are uncontested biological facts and may even be regarded as simple rudimentary pleasures, but mention of them in any way seems quite futile. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that as Utopia is not a harsh community, but rather, one whose main concern is the pursuit of human happiness, the humblest pleasures of the body ought to be included. Though these are regarded as inferior pleasures, the Utopians value them no further than is necessary: "they enjoy these pleasures too, and acknowledge gratefully the kindness of Mother Nature."[145]

In no way are those Utopians with physical disabilities, the sickly or the terminally ill neglected, contrarily, everything is done to ease the pain of those suffering from incurable diseases. Medical treatment is offered to those with simple ailments that are treatable, and those who have through illness or otherwise become physically unable to carry out their duties in society are made as comfortable as possible. However, if those who are suffering from incurable diseases feel that the pain becomes excruciatingly unbearable, then, they may practise euthanasia. The presence of public officials is also required. Here, I would then assume that these priests and public officials would have some

[143] More, *Utopia* 54. I cannot help but wonder if, upon writing this part, More was not contemplating relieving any itch of his own, because I imagine that his hair shirt, of very coarse cloth, must have given rise to a considerable amount of itchiness. Doubtless, most people have experienced the disquieting agony of a 'hidden' itch and the immense pleasure felt once it has duly been scratched. Then again, More must have endured such moments in a spirit of sacrifice, after all, that was probably the whole idea behind the hair shirt in the first place.
[144] More, *Utopia* 55.
[145] More, *Utopia* 56.

medical knowledge therefore to be able to reach the conclusion that nothing more may be done either to cure the person or at least ease their suffering. The invalid is counselled to bring an end to his agony and reminded that: "he is now unfit for any of life's duties, a burden to himself and to others; he has really outlived his own death."[146] The final decision remains, nonetheless, that of the invalid, and should he choose against euthanasia, he is not denied care.

This kind of death would be deemed honourable compared to those who commit suicide. Those who take their own lives without reason and without the approval of priests and senate are considered unworthy and their bodies are cast away disgraced and unburied. It is worthwhile reiterating that the Utopians endeavour to avoid any irrational or rushed decisions, so the motion for euthanasia would be deliberate and well-thought out. The invalid would not feel pressured, but instead comforted in the thought that irrespective of his choice he would be respected and aided, free of any guilt or sin.

In *Brave New World*, the individual is given no such choice. Then again, he lives 60 years so crammed full of *soma* happiness and conditioning that he does not want to choose, nor does he need to. This may be contemplated in the different societies created by More and Huxley, respectively. Whereas a Utopian is allowed to practise euthanasia, in the World State of *Brave New World*, biological engineering has practically eliminated disease, and any pain or semblance of unhappiness is controlled by large doses of *soma*. When a member of this society has fulfilled his pre-destined role, death follows 'naturally', without question or taboo. Were anyone to suffer "[from] one of the few remaining infectious diseases"[147] and death were unavoidable, it is seen quite matter-of-factly.

One such instance in which this indifference can be deduced is from the brief exchange between the Savage and a nurse at the Park Lane Hospital

[146] More *Utopia* 60. Seneca says something very much along these lines: "It is quite pathetic, after all, if one has put the will to die behind one, to be without the will to live" (Letter LXXVIII: 132).
[147] Huxley, *World* 169.

for the Dying – a sixty-storey tower of primrose tiles. His desire to be with his mother flouts all the conventions of the scientific and emotionally sterile society. The act of dying has been pillaged of any significance, and gone are the horrors associated with death, the taboos and the grief:

> 'Is there any hope? he asked. 'You mean, of her not dying?' (He nodded.) 'No, of course there isn't. When somebody's sent here, there's no …' Startled by the expression of distress on his pale face … She was not accustomed to this kind of thing in visitors. (Not that there were many visitors anyhow: or any reason why there should be many visitors.)[148]

Actually, it is quite ironic how the process of dying is treated in a manner that the reader beholds as being quite 'cheerful' and 'nonchalant'. The Savage goes to the seventeenth floor where he finds his mother Linda:

> … [in] a large room bright with sunshine and yellow paint, and containing twenty beds, all occupied. Linda was dying in company – in company with all the modern conveniences. The air was continuously alive with gay synthetic melodies … Television was left on, a running tap, from morning till night.[149]

Music is being played, but it is synthetic; there is company, but in the form of televisions; visitors are not expected, but why should they be? There is happiness, but in the form of *soma.* The contrast with Utopia is striking.

This brave new world comes across as being run like one giant industrial conveyor belt of human life cycle – human beings go in one end and come out the other. The only difference between them and robots is that they are made of flesh and blood and robots are not (not yet anyway), but the conditioning they receive can be likened to that of programming. They are also 'implanted' with intelligence levels according to social function, tastes, reproductive capacity and

[148] Huxley, *World* 180-181.
[149] Huxley, *World* 180.

so forth. Fordism, the philosophy of applied science and industrialism, is the religion of *Brave New World.* Through genetic manipulation and post-natal conditioning the rulers of this new world state have been triumphant in yielding "a race which loves its servitude, a race of standardized machine-minders for standardized machines who will never challenge their authority [World Controllers]."[150] Through genetic engineering and conditioning the World Controllers have eradicated old age and the terrors of death. In the process they have also done away with spiritual values and the need for God.

While *Utopia* and *Brave New World* might sit comfortably somewhere in the realm of fantasy, *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* pulls us into a whole other dimension. For starters, there is the added advantage of sight and sound in being able to see the film or watch the play being performed. Of course, under no circumstances am I proposing to undervalue the power of the human imagination; far from it, though, there is no denying the exceptional proximity that is felt between actor and viewer/audience. [151] But, for now, I shall suppose that there has not been an opportunity to view either. The affinity between text and reader remains equally strong because the events and arguments are so valid for our understanding of what the interruption of our pleasures implies, particularly at present.[152]

This issue of seeking human happiness through pleasure has a particularly ironic flavour in *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* because on the one hand technology may have provided society with exceptional amounts of pleasure, yet on the other, it may serve to remove equally exceptional amounts of pleasure. In the wake of technological advances, new questions have arisen which pose real challenges to specialists and thinkers in various fields of knowledge within society. In part, this

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[150] Peter Bowering, *Aldous Huxley: A Study of the Major Novels* (London: Athlone, 1968) 99.
[151] This would certainly be food for many hungry intellectual minds, particularly at present with the unfathomable amount of audio-visual media that our society is constantly bombarded with.
[152] I have made my words echo those of Seneca: "there are three things upsetting about any illness: the fear of dying, the physical suffering and the interruption of our pleasures." (Seneca LXXVII: 132). And, despite the length of time between Seneca writing such words and my feeble attempt at writing these, his could not ring any truer for today.

is one of the points Clark is arguing through Ken's character, that as science and technology develop, so too should society accompany this progress and continuously and rationally question changes and their effects on an individual's position in modern society. It is tricky, however, for reason alone has not provided modern society with solutions.

Ken is a man whose body may be broken but his spirit is certainly alive, his intellect is sharp and he manifests a wry wicked sense of humour. Although he realises that many people may choose to live with terrible handicaps or be kept artificially alive, for him, if he were to continue in this way, life would be too burdensome and certainly void of any pleasure. Indeed, he is unable to enjoy those rudimentary bodily pleasures, which in Utopian thought belong to a greater plane of happiness. Before the accident, he would have taken things of this nature for granted:

> KEN. It is a question of dignity. Look at me here. I can do nothing, not even the basic primitive functions. I cannot even urinate, I have a permanent catheter attached to me. Every few days my bowls are washed out. Every two hours two nurses have to turn me over or I would rot away from bedsores. Only my brain functions unimpaired but even that is futile because I can't act on any conclusions it comes to. This hearing proves that. Will you please listen?[153]

Suddenly, Ken finds himself confined to a bed frustrated at his impotence to put into action such "basic primitive functions" that Mother Nature habitually awards her children. However, it is ironic that it is society and not Mother Nature that is keeping him alive, and thereby causing him unhappiness at the realisation that he is unable to enjoy pleasures of any kind, even "the basic primitive" ones.

[153] Clark 73.

Had he befallen such circumstances in More's time there would have been no question of euthanasia, because Mother Nature would have taken her course. Without human intervention, but more exactly, without sophisticated medical technology, Ken would otherwise not survive. Ultimately, Ken is unable to take delight in the natural pleasures of his body, even the simple pleasure of "reliev[ing] an itch somewhere by rubbing or scratching it."[154] Therefore, he reasons that as he will have to spend the rest of his life in hospital with "everything geared just to keeping [his] brain active, with no real possibility of it ever being able to direct anything,"[155] the only rational choice he has left is to be released from hospital, despite assuredly facing his death. Here is where the crux of the play lies – who decides what is reasonable? The fluidity of the dialogue between the judge and Ken is truly impressive because both argue equally convincingly and with reason:

> JUDGE. But a man who is very desperately depressed is not capable of making a reasonable choice.
>
> KEN. As you said, my Lord, that is the question to be decided.
>
> JUDGE. Alright. You tell me why it is a reasonable choice that you decide to die.[156]

In this instance, a man's capacity to enjoy the pleasures of life has certainly been interrupted. In *Utopia*, a man faced with a similar predicament is empowered by the authoritative figure of the priest to decide his final demise. However, in *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* Clark selectively chooses very effective means to exhibit the contrast between the powerful arrogant medical profession and the incapacitated state of the patient whose will is ignored. The degree to which Ken must submit to the power of those who 'know best' is chillingly

[154] More, *Utopia* 54.
[155] Clark 73.
[156] Clark 73.

highlighted in an early scene when he is injected with a sedative against his will by Dr Emerson:

> KEN. Please let me make myself clear. I specifically refused permission to stick that needle in me and you didn't listen. You took no notice.
>
> DR EMERSON. You must rely on us, old chap. Of course you're depressed. I'll send someone along to have a chat with you. Now I must go and get on with my rounds.[157]

Ken is forced to seek another outlet in order to have his wish executed, so he turns to the law. However, he cannot plead the right to euthanasia, because it is illegal. So instead, he goes a roundabout way and pleads the right to *habeas corpus*. He asks to be released from hospital, knowing only full well what the implications will be. In essence, he requests passive euthanasia, which involves also the disconnection of any artificial means of life support. While some might regard this as the act of doing nothing to prevent death, others hold that it is simply allowing nature to take its course.

Utopians may practise, either what is known today as voluntary-active euthanasia by starving themselves to death or refusing medical treatment; or active euthanasia (also known as physician-assisted suicide) by taking a painless life-ending drug. Accordingly, today it would mean that the physician would prescribe and administer the deadly drug to the patient. In *Utopia*, it is not sufficiently clear who prescribes the "potion which puts them painlessly to sleep."[158] There must be some assistance involved, from getting the potion to actually ingesting it because the person may be too weak to do so on his own. On Utopia, this kind of death is considered honourable. Furthermore, the person who administers the potion is simply helping him to carry out his wishes to free him

[157] Clark 22.
[158] More, *Utopia* 60.

"from the rack of living," and will not be held liable for his actions.[159] For the citizens of the New World State, things are much simpler, because their bodies enter into 'natural' physical decline by the age of 60, aided, of course, by extra rations of *soma* and then off they go to be recycled into the useful chemical substance of P_2O_5.

In view of the above, it seems only natural, therefore, that advocates of euthanasia should take such delight in reading More's *Utopia*, for it clearly does seem to be a manifesto in defence of euthanasia. However, it is important to be wary of the 'subjective eye'. For instance, there are endless interpretations of a single verse in the Bible, not to mention the other hundreds of verses. Thus, while supporters of the euthanasia movement have had an inclination to view this (though somewhat fleeting) passage in *Utopia* as a clear manifestation of More's support, others speculate that it is merely a further demonstration of his unequalled wit and sense of humour. Acclaimed as a visionary forerunner for many, *Utopia* continues to this day to challenge fundamental truths in society, and although More was adamantly firm in his convictions, it would be interesting to see his approach to this clash of wills between two conflicting sides: the ethics of modern medical achievement and the will of the individual. Campbell writes that one of history's perplexing ironies is that: "the man, who by an airy imagination, devised the new and revolutionary ideal of the *Utopia*, should end his days as a martyr to beliefs which shackled man's intellect and denied freedom to man's thought."[160] In camouflaging his true intentions so well, More left us with his masterpiece *Utopia*, with enough intellectual nourishment for generations to feed upon.

[159] More, *Utopia* 60.
[160] Campbell, "The *Utopia*" 36.

III

PULLING AT COMMON THREADS

In order to keep up some semblance of a pattern in this study and to ensure fluidity, I am obliged to pick up the end of the thread of thought with which the previous chapter ended, and weave it into the fabric of this new chapter. Indeed, it has already been established that there are many common threads running through the literary works of More, Huxley and Clark, which help tremendously in better understanding the complexities that the euthanasia debate poses.

Utopia, More's unpretentious little book, went on to have such substantial impact that I do not believe it would be any exaggeration on my part to say that it set thinkers, practically from its conception onwards, fiercely wrestling with many of the issues being addressed in it. Perhaps, even more paradoxical is the fact that More did not care much for *Utopia*, which would come to be one of the canons of English literature. Regardless, the truth of the matter is that this reluctant 'father' to a literary genre begot many offspring of which *Brave New World* might even be regarded as a black sheep of the 'family'. The apparent inconceivability of utopia, and the many failures to bring it about, has produced its antithesis – dystopia – bleak forecasts of the doom that awaits humanity. Indeed, *Brave New World* is presented as a sombre and bitter satire, perhaps even more so now that we have a perspective from the twenty-first century.[1]

[1] *Brave New World* is described by some as the wittiest and most urbane of all anti-utopian worlds, compared for instance with the mercilessly daunting vision of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Perhaps, it would be worthwhile to reflect, at this point in the discussion, that over time, the meaning of a certain word might change. Such is the case with 'euthanasia' as I have already previously mentioned. I have also used the word 'wit' extensively in this study when describing More, Huxley and Clark, and it is this word (rather petite-looking though weighty in essence) that I hope to ever so briefly to address. I shall be leaning heavily on the definitions of Cuddon. In the Middle Ages this word meant 'sense' or 'the five senses' but it evolved in meaning, and during the Renaissance it came to mean 'intelligence' or 'wisdom' or even 'genius'. Skipping over other accretions it suffered throughout the ages, modern critics have now come to associate 'wit' with 'intellectual brilliance,' 'verbal deftness' and 'ingenuity'. (J. A. Cuddon, ed., *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin, 1999) 985-986).

What I am really contemplating here is the elusiveness there is in the relationship between what someone writes and what someone reads, particularly if the factor of distance is kept in mind. Writing can fix thoughts in time; consequently, such elements of one era can be carried into another. It becomes possible to engage in debate despite the chasm of time.

It is the case with euthanasia, which at present continues to agitate the waters of moral ethics, medicine and law particularly. Whilst other issues, which have at one time been regarded as morally fragile, have already cleared many hidden hurdles and broken down as many walls to become accepted and no longer questioned whether they are right or wrong. Although euthanasia might do as an example of one such issue, it is not admittedly the case for all cultures. Nonetheless, at present people behave in ways, which were once considered morally wrong but now are quite the norm for most cultures. Fashion comes and goes and the same may be said for utopias:

> … most sixteenth-century eutopias horrify today's reader even though the authors' intentions are clear. On the other hand, a sixteenth-century reader would consider most twentieth-century eutopias as dys-topias worthy of being burnt as works of the devil.[2]

Brave New World would certainly fit the bill. Set many hundreds of years in the future of English Renaissance man, it possesses all the necessary elements to fully qualify for a good old-fashioned heretical burning at the stake. Heedless promiscuity, artificial propagation, unorthodox rituals and drug-induced death would, at the very least, be regarded as morally despicable, unthinkable and beyond any shadow of a doubt, heretical. It can hardly be surprising that, despite being set in the very distant future, even some of Huxley's own contemporaries did not read *Brave New World* with the same amount of relish with which he

[2] Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, eds., *The Utopia Reader* (New York: New York UP, 1999) 1.

wrote it: “Mr. Aldous Huxley’s new novel is definitely a disappointment … as a story it lacks interest … nothing is more grotesquely improbable than that … all our present spiritual values will be meaningless to us.”[3]

Nonetheless, the reception awarded to a writer by his peers and by the public in general (whether positive or negative), ought to be regarded as a source of substantial worth to the student of literature. The reasons for this are indelibly manifold, but I shall merely point out four. Firstly, a considerable amount may be learnt about the state of criticism in general and more directly about the progress of critical attitudes towards a single writer. Secondly, it is possible to gain a clearer perception of the tastes and literary thought of individual readers of the period. Thirdly, it opens the window onto a better understanding of a writer’s historical situation, the make-up of his immediate reading-public and his response to these pressures. And finally, the reader has the opportunity to enrich his own understanding of the different ways in which literature has been read and judged.

Huxley’s *Brave New World* portrays a utopian future based on science and technology where forced conformity is exchanged with eugenics and conditioning. Not only does Huxley use his characters and plots as “purveyors of truth”, reverberating his disillusionment with society and its values, but his cynicism and profound pessimism of humanity is also widely reflected within the text: “Human beings are given free will in order to choose between insanity on the one hand and lunacy on the other.”[4] His vision of ‘perfection’ sees the attrition of individuality for the sake of stability requiring the sacrifice of art, science and religion. Individuality is both repressed and it is exterminated before and after birth through various forms of conditioning. The citizens of this New World State are so emotionally conditioned that they are oblivious to the existence of others as being ‘special’. Should someone die, they are impermeable to grief. Instead, death is treated as natural and even pleasant:

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[3] Gerald Bullett, “A Review on Brave New World,” *Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Donald Watt (London: Routledge, 1975) 213.
[4] Huxley, “Foreword,” *World* n. pag.

> It was some human being finally and definitely disappearing. Going up in a squirt of hot gas … Then, in a resolutely cheerful voice, 'Anyhow,' he concluded, 'there's one thing we can be certain of; whoever he may have been, he was happy when he was alive. Everybody's happy now.'[5]

Huxley wrote his 'bad' Utopia in four months, but what had started out light-heartedly enough would turn out to be one of the twentieth-century's greatest prophetic and philosophical works, promoting the most varied of interpretations; one of which is that *Brave New World* is a foreboding forecast of scientific apocalypse. Nevertheless, in his Foreword to the Flamingo edition, Huxley affirms that:

> The theme of *Brave New World* is not the advancement of science as such; it is the advancement of science as it affects human individuals. The triumphs of physics, chemistry and engineering are tacitly taken for granted. The only scientific advances to be specifically described are those involving the application to human beings of the results of future research in biology, physiology and psychology.[6]

3.1. Reading Between the Lines

In order to understand the footing that the euthanasia debate has in *Brave New World*, it is necessary to raise the intellectual cloth, even if ever so slightly, so as to take a peek at what drove Huxley. It would be pure conjecture to say that a man's physical appearance reveals something, if anything, about his personality or intellectual inclinations. More, for one, is no example to go by for he wore a hair shirt under his garments, and look how much speculative dust that has lifted –

[5] Huxley, *World* 67.
[6] Huxley, "Foreword," *World* n. pag.

the proverb “a book can’t be judged by its cover” could not be more accurate. But, what of Huxley? What drove this man of evident wit and deftness with the pen?

Prior to Huxley writing *Brave New World*, there had already been visible stirrings of a pro-euthanasia movement in England. The first two decades of the twentieth century had been greeted with a generous amount of writings advocating the right of an individual to practise euthanasia. However, although the issue was not that much of a novelty in 1931, Dr Millard’s speech that same year proposing the alteration of the law to allow euthanasia under certain circumstances was received with an assortment of reactions.[7] What is certain is that by the time Huxley started to write *Brave New World*, the issue of euthanasia had once again been thrown right into the limelight.

Indeed, for Huxley, the first two decades of the twentieth-century seemed to have flung Pandora’s box wide open. The Nazi Party movement in Germany, Mussolini’s dictatorship in Italy and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia are but some of the more significant events on the international scene, which Huxley perceived as dangerous, precisely because they placed the state above the individual and demanded total allegiance to a cause. While all this political upheaval was going on, the economic changes in and between countries were equally towering. Factories were growing in size and number, goods were being manufactured at an inestimable rate, there were massive upheavals of people moving into cities and, of course, there was the advent of mass-produced automobiles. An increasingly industrial and commercial world was using and abusing the individual and threatening to mould him according to its image. One of Huxley’s greatest preoccupation was the threat to man’s freedom and individuality, which is discernable in his satirical projection of scores of identical

[7] See pages 46 to 48 of this study.

twins performing identical tasks: "'Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!'"[8]

Clearly, there are many concerns of a pressing and immediate nature for Huxley, which he cleverly sets down in his counter utopia through a variety of literary techniques. Much of Huxley's inspiration is owed to his considerable background knowledge in many fields of study, which is evidenced in many of the allusions in *Brave New World*. The Malthusian belt is one such allusion made to Thomas R. Malthus (1766-1834), an English political economist. In his "An Essay on the Principle of Population" he argued that population (growing geometrically) would soon increase the means of subsistence (which grew only arithmetically), and that checks in the form of poverty, disease and starvation were necessary. In a second edition, he modified his conclusions, suggesting that the regulation of greed and sexual activity would act as more acceptable checks on population growth. Darwin, supposedly, declared that Malthus's essay helped to point him towards his own theory of evolution. In the New World State mandatory birth control measures are used to regulate the growth of population. The connection between Malthus and the Malthusian belt is inescapable: "And round her waist she wore a silver-mounted green morocco-surrogate cartridge belt, bulging (for Lenina was not a freemartin) with the regulation supply of contraceptives … 'What a perfectly *sweet* Malthusian belt.'"[9]

Another allusion is that made to Henry Ford (1863-1947), the American car magnate who successfully mass-produced the Model T automobile, using such methods as specialised labour and conveyor-belt assembly lines. In Huxley's *Brave New World*, Christ's life, work and teachings are replaced by Ford's, and he becomes the source of all inspiration and truth: "'The case of Little Reuben occurred only twenty-three years after Our Ford's first T-Model was put on the

[8] Huxley, *World* 5.
[9] Huxley, *World* 45.

market.' (Here the Director made a sign of the T on his stomach and all the students reverently followed suit.)"[10]

It is also worthwhile looking at Huxley's own genealogical tree because, by the time of his birth, his family name had become synonymous with eruditeness. His grandfather T. H. Huxley (one time assistant surgeon on HMS *Rattlesnake* and later professor of Natural History) wrote extensively on specialist subjects, and his views on education, religion, philosophy and evolution, as well as on man's newly conceived place in the universe, had a profound impact on the nineteenth-century.[11]

Matthew Arnold (1822-88) was uncle to Huxley's mother, and his essay writing turned him into one of the leading critics of his day. He was also well-versed in the classics, lecturing at one time on translating Homer. In many of his works, he sharply criticised the provincialism, philistinism, sectarianism and utilitarian materialism of English life and culture, and argued that England needed more intellectual curiosity, more ideas, and a more comparative, European outlook.

William Morris (1834-96), contemporary to Arnold, wrote *News from Nowhere* (1891), which is a Utopian socialist fantasy where the countryside has

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[10] Huxley, *World* 21. The choice of the names for the characters in Huxley's novel are worthwhile commenting on, because they also reflect how he has interwoven his concerns with society into the novel itself. Marx is clearly a reference to Karl Marx whose most acclaimed work, *Das Kapital*, voices his conviction that the fundamental factor in the development of society is the method of production and exchange. The female character Lenina is a variation of Lenin, the Russian socialist Nikolai Lenin, who wielded formidable influence on the formation of the USSR. A further character, Benito Hoover, has the names of two figures in world politics who exerted formidable power at the time Huxley was writing *Brave New World*: Benito Mussolini was the Italian dictator at the time and Herbert Hoover was the President of the United States.

[11] See also pages 46 and 47 of this study. The *Nineteenth Century* was a monthly review founded in 1877, which brought together in its pages the most eminent advocates of conflicting views. Among its contributors, besides T. H. Huxley, were Gladstone, Ruskin, B. Webb, W. Morris and Wilde (in 1951 the title was changed to *The Twentieth Century*.) This further reflects the intellectual mood that must have filled the Huxley home. Julian Sorell Huxley (1887-1975), Huxley's brother, was also a biologist and writer. There is no doubt that Huxley grew up in very exciting times. For instance, in 1905 (Huxley was 11 at the time), Einstein published some articles that rocked the scientific world. He ruthlessly questioned assumptions no one else had dared to, and his ideas shook the universe. He toppled Newton's laws of motion with relative ease and then turned to new scientific challenges. Like Newton he was obsessed, unsure if he was on the right path or on a fool's errand.

been reclaimed from industrial squalor and money and central government have been abolished. Morris had tremendous hatred of industrial 'shoddy', in other words furniture and decor that was repetitive and of poor quality. It is worthwhile to note that this socialist Utopian was not only greatly influenced by More's *Utopia*, but he was just as influential on others, for instance, Huxley himself. I recall one such moment in *Brave New World* that is particularly striking. In "How We Live and How We Might Live" Morris is describing how pleasure and art are being threatened by ravenous consumerism; he states that "[the worker] must swallow all his civilization in the lump."[12] It is a metaphor, which Huxley picks up on to show the Savage's disillusionment with the New World State:

> 'I say,' Helmholtz exclaimed solicitously, 'you *do* look ill John!'
> 'Did you eat something that didn't agree with you?' asked Bernard.
> The Savage nodded. 'I ate civilization.'
> 'What?'
> 'It poisoned me; I was defiled …'[13]

A further aspect, which More writes at length about in *Utopia* is the importance of the individual's well being. Morris picks up on this in his writings, claiming that in order to have a good life four elements are essential: "a healthy body … an active mind … occupation fit for a healthy body and an active mind … [and] a beautiful world to live in."[14] Huxley also encompasses his fascination with the human body and how it functions in *Brave New World*, although he has been targeted with much unfavourable criticism: "Unfortunately, Huxley spoils the effect by the vividness of … the repulsiveness of the physical … sympathies would seem to lie with Lenina rather that with the peasant life … defeats its own

[12] William Morris, "How We Live and How We Might Live," ed. A. L. Morton (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1973) 140.
[13] Huxley, *World* 220.
[14] Morris 156. It is an ideal that More speaks clearly in favour of, and which has already been discussed earlier on in Chapter 2.

satiric purpose."[15] Irrespective of such criticism, the fact remains that although Huxley's novel is filled with references to body odour, sickness, disease, blood and gut, he is also concerned with the mind and the spirit. In doing so, he makes reference to the influence of the physical on the mental, and the influence of the physiological condition of man on the psychological.

This 'bi-angular' view allows him to consider both aspects of the same event. One such moment in *Brave New World* that springs to mind is when the Savage is at the hospital at the moment of Linda's death. Huxley describes the psychological effects of *soma* on Linda and her worn out physical appearance – "a monster of flaccid and distorted senility" – as opposed to the other "moribund sexagenarians [who] had the appearance of childish girls."[16] The physical and psychological are neatly juxtaposed.

Supposing man to be a social animal, the objective of the preceding words has been to establish the extent to which Huxley's creativity was influenced by his gene pool and the external influence of the intellectualism that surrounded him, along with the economic, social and political 'mood' the world found itself in, both before and while he wrote *Brave New World*.[17] In having done so, I hope to have set the stage for a deeper discussion on euthanasia and how this issue is addressed in Huxley's novel.

3.2. "Straight from the Horse's Mouth"[18]

In the rigid and conventional society that More has constructed in *Utopia*, the reader lacks the point of view of a citizen and is left to wonder just how much individual free will, and not psychological conditioning, there might actually be. Utopia is a complex organisation, in which the individual must work for the

[15] C. S. Ferns, *Aldous Huxley: Novelist* (London: Athlone, 19880) 145.
[16] Huxley, *World* 183.
[17] Huxley was to become good friends with D. H. Lawrence, whose first collection of *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* he edited in the same year that he published his own novel, *Brave New World.*
[18] Huxley, *World* 2.

greater good and benefit of society. Therefore, it is interesting to note the arguments used by the priests and public officials when recommending euthanasia:

> … they remind him that he is now unfit for any of life's duties, a burden to himself and to others; he has really outlived his own death … he should not hesitate to free himself, or to let others free him, from the rack of living.[19]

Not forgetting that Utopia runs as a finely oiled machine and every individual is a crucial cog for it to run smoothly, and realising that he is unable to fulfil his full potential as a citizen and an individual, he is 'free' to make his choice. Is he? Surely these words emanate irony and satire.

Lets examine these words more scrupulously: "everything is done to mitigate the pain of those who are suffering … visitors do their best to console them."[20] The first impression that is left after reading this is that unquestionably it must be horrific to suffer so intensely; certainly, life must not appear worthy of the effort, but it is fortunate, nonetheless, to have such caring and good-hearted people nearby. It seems only reasonable that death should be sought, after all, pleasure and happiness have been removed from the equation and Utopians are known to make their decisions based on reason. It is rational to bring physical life to an end. Utopians are also known to regard humanity as: "the virtue most proper to human beings," and "to relieve the misery of others, assuage their griefs … removing all sadness from their life … is pleasure."[21] Therefore, I am led to speculate that a Utopian offering words of comfort (even if they include the recommendation of self-inflicted death) to a fellow Utopian, who is on his deathbed, would inevitably be living up to the ideal of Utopian virtuosity –

[19] More, *Utopia* 60.
[20] More, *Utopia* 60.
[21] More, *Utopia* 51.

"helping a fellow-creature's comfort and welfare."[22] This may sound unduly cynical, but where exactly are those other human, equally natural emotions most people experience? For instance, pride, ambition and vanity, among others? Could it not be one of those 'sinful' emotions that prompts the Utopian do-gooder to go and offer words of comfort? Indeed, Hythloday confirms that: "It is especially praiseworthy, they tell us, when we provide for our fellow-creature's comfort and welfare."[23] But, of course, to hanker after praise and then gloat over it would not be reasonable: Utopians seem to have been cut from a different cloth to that of the English back in More's England. And, to Huxley's and to Clark's.

The Utopian, who is on death row, hears the sage priest's words, someone who understands him, someone who is respected above all others. The priest tells him that he is "unfit" for "duties" and that he is a "burden to others" – quite disconcerting and quite frankly defeatist. Better yet, he should "let others free him."[24] To top it all, if he decides to "free" himself, he will be "obeying the advice of the priests." Something seems amiss. On the one hand, they seem to be genuinely interested in the dying *man's* well-being and in bringing his torturous agony to an end. Yet, on the other, they seem to be promoting the *state's* well-being. Granted, they promise to care for him should he decide not to end his life. However, the argument in favour of staying alive and allowing nature to take its course does not do much to help tip the scale in its favour. In order for the State to function regularly, it needs healthy able-bodied citizens to carry out the varied tasks – to keep the social machine running smoothly. The physical, mental and spiritual elements form a triumvirate. The Utopians clearly place much value

[22] More, *Utopia* 51. It seems More is really just toying with the reader. When he wrote this, he did so for the pleasure of his erudite friends and not for the public in general. Besides, no matter how hard readers might try, few must actually be able to tear themselves away from the time capsule in which they are enclosed.
[23] More, *Utopia* 51. It is disclosed to the reader that the Utopians are also sinners, and in order to sin, other sentiments besides the 'good' ones have been at work. At this particular moment adultery comes to mind, and I think that the sentiments that drive people to commit such a sin ought to qualify.
[24] More, *Utopia* 60.

on the importance of physical health, as can be understood from the substantial amount of attention that is dedicated to it in *Utopia*.

Is this not, even if inadvertently, conditioning too? Utopians are encouraged, I say conditioned, to care for their physical and mental well-being, not only because it gives them pleasure, but because it is also advantageous to the State. I shall then look at another peculiarity in Utopian life that will perhaps help to substantiate my speculation.

It is worthwhile to remember, whereas some cultures find hunting pleasurable, the Utopians are strongly opposed to senseless killing: "Taking such relish in the sight of death, even if it's only beasts, reveals, in the opinion of the Utopians, a cruel disposition."[25] Furthermore, "[Utopians] despise war as an activity fit only for beasts," and in the case of prisoners of war, "their punishment is death or slavery."[26] They are prone to view the whole act of hunting as undignified for free men, as can be deduced from the fact that all their butchers are slaves. There is nothing naturally pleasant about hunting or slaughtering animals. Paradoxically, on Utopia, the death penalty exists, for example; a second conviction of adultery is punishable with death, and the most serious crimes are punishable with slavery, firstly, because they think this is a good deterrent for potential offenders just as much as instant capital punishment, and secondly, because it is more advantageous to the state. Indeed, the fear of bondage may be a better deterrent to potential would-be criminals, but is that the real motivation? Once again, further emphasis is attributed to their concern for the *state*. Those who commit grave crimes are spared precisely because they are of use to the state. They may still work, as opposed to an individual with an incurable disease who has outlasted his sell-by-date and who is anyhow too debilitated to be useful to the state or to seek pleasure. Nonetheless, he is 'free' to choose.

Writers of utopian and dystopian fiction have picked up on this undercurrent of the psychological conditioning of citizens. In *Brave New World*,

[25] More, *Utopia* 54.
[26] More, *Utopia* 66-67.

this conditioning is not at all subliminal, but rather it has become a 'natural' extension of their being: "Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks – already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked … What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder."[27] Psychological manipulation has an early start for the citizens of this 'brave new world'. Huxley's pessimistic portrayal of the world makes the reader wonder if the blissfully ignorant 'happy' lives they are living are worth the cost. He is arguing that the advances that are almost universally hailed as progress are fraught with danger and the 'happiness' brought on by progress cannot compensate for the cost which is needed – the loss of individuality, the deprivation of speech, and thereby all that is creative, like art and literature. The parallel with our own society is unmistakable. Huxley is making a critique of how increasingly consumerist society is becoming and he never got to see things as they are in the twenty-first century: "Human beings are conditioned by the society which manufactures consumer goods into a preference for the artificial, the complicated, and the expensive over the simple, the natural, and the cheap."[28]

In the New World State that Huxley has created, a child's attitude to death is quite simply one of indifference. The absence of what present-day Western societies would call normal and healthy reactions, such as the usual emotions of horror, confusion and grief, can be ascribed to careful biological engineering and scientific conditioning. Children are taken to hospitals and given treats while they watch patients die. In fact, they become so emotionally detached and void of any feeling, that the Savage's uncontrollable sobbing upon his mother's death is received with surprise and confusion. Keith May asserts that the reason for this reaction is that: "Brave-New-Worldians think they have proved that an individual is the sum of the suggestions implanted into him, and, therefore, since he is bound to be reluctant to leave his happy life, it is humane to distract

[27] Huxley, *World* 18. We often hear this expression during a Christian matrimonial religious ceremony. Once the ritual of exchanging vows is over, the priest will state that 'what *God* has joined, *man* is powerless to put asunder.'
[28] Ferns 140.

him in his last hours."[29] Indeed, the nurse regards his outburst not only as scandalous and anti-social, but also as a serious threat:

> The nurse stood irresolute …poor children! … staring with all their eyes and nostrils at the shocking scene … what fatal mischief he might do to these poor innocents? Undoing all their wholesome death-conditioning with this disgusting outcry – as though death were something terrible, as though anyone mattered as much as all that! It might give them the most disastrous ideas about the subject, might upset them into reacting in the entirely wrong, the utterly anti-social way.[30]

Most readers are left at the very least unsettled (if not horrified) once the starkness of the events around Linda's death are fully absorbed, but just how appalled ought they to be feeling? This may in fact seem quite an odd question to be asking, but the question does not seem that ill-conceived. Bertrand Russell proposes that we are under the impression we can choose what we are and accordingly we would not desire this choice be taken from us by scientific manipulation, such as genetic engineering, drug induced behaviour, electric shock treatment and hypnopaedia throughout our childhood.[31] According to Russell, this is an irrational feeling because as nature takes its course the embryo develops through a series of natural events. Through random lessons of pleasure and pain, the infant's tastes are determined:

> The child listens to moral propaganda, which may fail through being unscientific, but which, none the less, is intended to mould the character just as much as Mr. Huxley's whispering machines. It seems, therefore, that we do not object to moulding a human being, provided it is done badly; we only object when it is

[29] Keith M. May, *Aldous Huxley*, ed. Graham Hough (London: Elek Books, 1972) 113.
[30] Huxley, *World* 187-188.
[31] Bertrand Russell, "We Don't Want to Be Happy," *Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Donald Watt (London: Routledge, 1975) 210-212.

> done well. What we cling to so desperately is the illusion of freedom, an illusion which is tacitly negated by all moral instruction and all propaganda.[32]

He cites examples of how this 'conditioning' and illusion of freedom breeds hatred and contempt between nations. The article goes on a bit further much along these lines, leaving the reader with the fleeting impression that Russell thinks the world could only become stable if such an illusion were shattered and emotions were erased from our genetic makeup. His concern lies primarily with the ever-increasing advancement of technology, in particular that of the armed forces, and that if emotions spiral out of control in today's world, it could lead to the unfathomable destruction of civilisation, as we know it. These fears are similar to those expressed by campaigners against the legalisation of euthanasia. I am not saying that they support such a theory of eradicating emotions from human genetic makeup altogether. Rather, they stress the factor that conditioning, particularly by radical and totalitarian political factions, can lead to abuses.

Once again, I point to events in Nazi Germany prior to and during World War II: "The intellectual and legal progress of the euthanasia movement, particularly in the English-speaking world, has been seriously hampered by the haunting memory of German atrocities."[33] Nazi racial ideology was taken further with the indoctrination of a program of eugenics and race hygiene. Sterilisation and euthanasia were but baby steps in that direction. In order for such a program to be viable and for an absolutist state to carry out its extremist policies, absolute control is necessary. So first, they had to wait for crafty propaganda – alias 'conditioning' – to sink in. Soon enough, those (the physically and mentally disabled, the elderly, the terminally ill) who were regarded as 'useless eaters,' 'unworthy of life' and 'socially useless' were being quietly put down, with little

[32] Russell 211. Although these words might emanate an overly generous amount of doom and gloom, they remain strikingly real and eerie nonetheless. And, what makes it even more troubling is that there would be no need to quote from history to show how true it is.
[33] Mike Brogden, *Geronticide: Killing the Elderly* (London: Athenaeum, 2001) 20.

stirrings from society. However, it is important to be cautious and always bear in mind both horns of the dilemma, particularly one that draws such passionate responses. According to David Lamb, the meaning of 'euthanasia' is not the same in Nazi literature as it is in current usage. "It was a code name," he says, "which the Nazis used as both camouflage and euphemism for a programme of murder – killing various categories of persons because they were regarded as racially valueless, deformed, insane, senile or any other combination thereof."[34] He goes on to point out that the killing was not analogous to current proposals for euthanasia. Those people were never killed because they were ill or suffering intolerable pain or because it was the patient's own will: "the killing took place in the wider context of a racially motivated genocide strategy."[35] It is quite eerie how many ideologies and practices in *Brave New World* actually overlap with events in the Second World War, which naturally only helps to cement many convictions of just how prophetic the novel is.

In Huxley's text, thanks to advances in biological technology, genetics and science, methods of conditioning are far more sophisticated. Of course the citizens of the New World State also take *soma*, a mild hallucinogenic drug, which has been advocated by the government in order to keep people happy and blissfully ignorant of the true nature of the society they are living in. Huxley himself in later years of his life, after having written *Brave New World*, took it upon himself to experiment with mescalin, a hallucinogen, and came to the conclusion that such numbing substances should be used for what they afforded the senses – a transcendence, arguing that: "it is and always has been one of the principle appetites of the soul."[36] Drug-induced utopias do nothing to change the world except for changing the individual, who becomes ignorant of his surroundings and manipulation. He is goaded on by the false notion that he is transcending reality

[34] Lamb 27
[35] Lamb 28.
[36] Aldous Huxley, "RX for Sense and Psyche: The Doors of Perception," *Collected Essays*, by Aldous Huxley (London: Chatto, 1960) 329.

thereby reaching a higher state of perfection. Life is shrouded in illusion. And, loneliness. Even if it is an ignorant loneliness.

Solitude as well as nature seem propitious for founding a utopia, although this solitude often leads to a distrust of other people. A utopia in nature is solitary. Take for instance, Robinson Crusoe, who upon a shipwreck finds himself stranded on a small and deserted island in the middle of nowhere. He gradually accommodates himself to his newfound peaceful and solitary existence until it is shattered by the discovery of a single human footprint in the sand, throwing him into a paranoiac frenzy of suspicion.

Just as Huxley believed that hallucinogenic drugs could expand and open up normal sensory perceptions, so too does the solitude of nature have the ability to make one more observant and conscious of one's surroundings. In 'Innisfree', W. B. Yeats dreams of going to live alone by a lake, where he would take notice of things normally ignored and taken for granted. Many defenders of euthanasia argue that if treatment, or artificial feeding or breathing, is stopped in certain cases, it would be a simple matter of allowing nature to follow its course. To choose to end life and thus be removed from society would be a solitary, yet natural, choice. While nature utopias may seem to be the most peaceful, they require an individual to remove himself from society. While these utopias do not impose beliefs on others like so many others do, the rejection of society seems selfish and anti-social.[37]

However, not only does the New State thrive on a high-modernist ideology, but it is also bound by scientific and technological progress. The expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of insatiable human need and desire, the mastery of nature as well as the mastery of human nature and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws. The implementation of such an ideology by an

[37] This is an aspect that I shall develop at a later stage when discussing Ken's particular circumstances. He too will have to confront society, and his confrontation will appear selfish and anti-social.

authoritarian government results in incredible and unfathomable destruction. In *Brave New World*, imagination has been eliminated, because the undisputed state compels citizens to be more machine-like. Fantasy, emotion, curiosity and faith are regarded as unorthodox:

> The nurse stood irresolute, looking now at the kneeling figure by the bed (the scandalous exhibition!) and now (poor children!) at the twins who had stopped their hunting of the zipper and were staring from the other end of the ward, staring with all their eyes and nostrils at the shocking scene that was being enacted round Bed 20. Should she speak to him? try to bring him back to a sense of decency?[38]

The Savage is distraught with the idea that Linda's death is imminent. Conventionally, in most cultures, people tend to fall silent at the moment when death seems to be close by as a sign of respect and solemnity. It is reserved for intense emotions, which may manifest themselves in different guises: tears, anger, fear and horror, among many others. That seems normal enough, at the very least natural. However, the Savage's tears and intense unhappiness are not greeted with sympathy or understanding. Instead, his outburst of emotion is looked upon as been scandalous, unorthodox and indecent: in this society, emotional engineering has practically done away with all but one emotion – happiness – and even that is artificial. Nonetheless, should anyone begin to feel even the slightest stirrings of negative thoughts, anger or unhappiness, *soma* adjusts the weights on the scale once more to tip in favour of 'happiness'. *Soma* is taken indiscriminately and eagerly; it is taken because lives, just like society, are void of spirituality or higher meaning, and because people prefer to numb their sensibilities rather than heighten them.

[38] Huxley, *World* 187.

> '… Everybody's happy now.'
> 'Yes, everybody's happy now,' echoed Lenina. They had heard the words repeated a hundred and fifty times every night for twelve years.'[39]

Just moments before Linda dies, the Savage is called to the hospital. Kneeling at his mother's bedside, he is a whirlpool of emotions. When he notices scores of twins streaming around her bed, he feels outright indignation. His reaction of intense anger is minimally understandable, because in his perspective, suffering and death are meant to be treated with dignity; yet, they are treating the whole event as if it were an afternoon stroll in the park, and the moribund lying on their beds were mere curiosities:

> '… What are these filthy little brats doing here at all? It's disgraceful!'
> 'Disgraceful? But what do you mean? They're being death-conditioned. And I tell you,' she warned him truculently, 'if I have any more of your interference with their conditioning, I'll send for the porters and have you thrown out.'[40]

This juxtaposition of reactions to death in two opposing worlds (that of the savage and the civilised) is extremely valuable for the euthanasia debate, because it provides a wonderful opportunity to consider its plausibility in the real world. On the one hand, all the taboos, etiquettes and rituals that enshrouded death in the past of the citizens of the New World State have been lifted. Indeed, they have no recollection of any such thing, because to them history is absent and therefore meaningless: "history is bunk."[41] That is partly why they find the Savage's reactions so perplexing and shocking. This repugnance can be traced back to the words of the Controller himself who tells the reader that words like 'mother', 'home', 'family', 'romance' and 'love' are vile. He is so evocative in his description of these concepts that "one of the boys, more sensitive than the rest,

[39] Huxley, *World* 67.
[40] Huxley, *World* 184.
[41] Huxley, *World* 30.

turned pale at the mere description and was on the point of being sick."[42] In this new society, there are no close relationships because the individual, as the bearer of feelings and opinion no longer matters.

In order to ensure that emotional ties are rendered impossible, several techniques have been applied, among which is the already mentioned sleep-teaching. Citizens of the New World State are taught to squander their strength and leisure hours on mindless crowd pleasures like playing Obstacle Golf or going to foolish feelies. This is done with the accompaniment of *soma*, which intoxicates without bringing on any detrimental effect on the nervous system and it keeps emotions nicely numbed. Should by some unlucky and unforeseen miscalculation a person feel a twinge of unhappiness, or anger for that matter, there is always the drug *soma*: "to restore the individual to the peak of technologically efficient euphoria."[43] Finally, but equally important, is the social duty of promiscuity: "it discourages far more than puritanism the growth of that disintegrating factor, love."[44] Any sign of the beginning of more meaningful and lasting affection is rebuked and quickly stamped out. It is anti-social. The inclination towards religion has (through skilful conditioning) been transposed to a deity known as Our Ford, whose dazzling and elegant words continue to be repeated indeterminately: "Everyone belongs to everyone else."[45] Finally, if disease has practically been eradicated and youth is artificially prolonged till the age of 60, it makes perfect sense that the very act of dying has been looted of all significance. Birnhaum states that:

> Even death has lost some of its former awesomeness because now everybody is gradually conditioned to accept death with the same indifference as would be accorded to the decanting of babies … after death, the corpse is removed to a

[42] Huxley, *World* 32.
[43] Milton Birnhaum, *Aldous Huxley's Quest for Values*, (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 1971) 145.
[44] Rebecca West, "Brave New World," *Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Donald Watt (London: Routledge, 1975) 199.
[45] Huxley, *World* 41.

> laboratory so that the chemicals of the body can be extracted for further experimental and industrial use.[46]

For the Controller, scientific intervention has been crucial in the eradication of all those emotions deemed as dangerous to progress and stability. The sentiments that are usually associated with motherhood, marriage, old age and disease have been abolished from the World State, and so, Lenina's reaction of horror to all she sees on the Reservation is hardly surprising. However, both ways of life are based on ignorance – an ignorance based on superstition or an ignorance fostered by the State. Huxley does not consider either way of life attractive or desirable, because he believes that life should be conscious existence, based on reflection, study and acceptance of one's own being.[47]

Consequently, if there are no ties of affection or no sense of moral values (at least undistorted ones), then it seems only plausible that the right to euthanasia would not be questioned. In fact, there is no need for euthanasia for the simple reason that disease and old age have been removed along with sentiment. Furthermore, the word 'euthanasia' would be as meaningless and perplexing as words like 'mother' and 'love', because *soma* and all the other means of sophisticated scientific conditioning are ever present. Certainly, a New World physician would have no qualms in administering a lethal dose to bring an already ill-fated life to an end, as is the case with Linda.

When Linda is returned to the civilised New World State, she is not received with open arms or with the same amount of euphoria that the Savage is, because to all intents and purposes she is not a real savage as such. She is only a forty-four-year old Beta but, unlike any one of her contemporaries, she has lost her youthful appearance: "Bloated, sagging, and among those firm youthful bodies, those undistorted faces, a strange and terrifying monster of middle-

[46] Birnhaum, *Quest* 145.
[47] See Aldous Huxley, *Literature and Science* (London: Chatto, 1963) 64-93.

agedness, Linda advanced into the room."[48] The only responses she manages to rouse go from astonishment and horror, to mockery and finally repugnance, for "to say one was a mother … was past a joke: it was an obscenity."[49] Thus, ageing Linda is unable to find a niche in this 'brave new civilisation', and so she is condemned to a long *soma* holiday.

Nonetheless, the possibility of taking continuous *soma* trips pleases Linda no end for it enables her to flee from her dismal reality. Besides, unlike the nasty *peyotl* which leaves her feeling terribly nauseous and as if she has done something shamefully anti-social, *soma* is just perfect. Despite being fully conscious of the end result, the physician does not quibble as to the dosage she ought to take, and so she takes larger and larger doses more and more frequently:

> Dr Shaw at first demurred; then let her have what she wanted. She took as much as twenty grammes a day.
> 'Which will finish her off in a month or two,' the doctor confided to Bernard. 'One day the respiratory centre will be paralysed. No more breathing. Finished. And a good thing too.'
> …
> Of course,' Dr Shaw went on, 'you can't allow people to go popping off into eternity if they've got any serious work to do. But as she hasn't got any serious work …'[50]

Considering the New World State's rationale, which gives social utility or economic returns precedence over individual freedom, then the death of such a 'socially useless' person, like Linda, would be practical. Applying this to the present day context, opponents of legalised euthanasia argue that the slippery slope may begin precisely with the employment of cost-benefit criteria for the evaluation of a life. To take this further still, the rationale of economic stability –

[48] Huxley, *World* 135.
[49] Huxley, *World* 138.
[50] Huxley, *World* 139.

the attitude that we will not spend so much per year to keep someone alive on the slim chance of recovery – might just override personal autonomy. This argument is clearly in keeping with the New World State policies, because Linda has no "serious work" and it is therefore not economically viable to 'keep' her. A further curiosity is the physician's indirect reference to suicide. When he says "you can't allow people to go popping off into eternity if they've got any serious work to do," a bell seems to sound the names of the ancient classical philosophers. If an individual is useful to the state, then he has a responsibility to the state. In killing himself, he would be depriving the state of one of its soldiers. The same clearly happens in this futuristic dystopian society.

Nowadays, the cost of keeping someone alive is sometimes so great that it has become one of the paradigms advanced by some supporters of euthanasia, who argue that in such instances it would not be morally objectionable to advocate euthanasia. Needless to say, such an attitude in today's world could only be highly controversial. Another present day issue, which is equally polemical and is unwittingly touched on by Dr Shaw, is the debate over the principle of 'double effect'. For instance, in cases of inoperable cancer, drugs to relieve unbearable pain could be administered even if they shorten life. There is no question whether this would be undertaken in *Brave New World*, and certainly it seems to have been the case with Linda. In spite of not making concrete mention of whether Linda continues to be fed, for the sake of continuity, I will just assume that she continues to eat and drink on her intervals in between *soma* doses. Of course, it could also be done intravenously, and I once again take for granted that physicians in the New World State have access to such medical knowledge.

In *Utopia*, neither of these issues arise, for people with disabilities or those who are terminally ill but do not wish to practise euthanasia are cared for, regardless of expenses. There is always someone who is available day or night to feed and care for all other needs. Should they wish to end their lives they can do so by taking a poison that they are duly provided with a potion, which puts them painlessly to sleep. Or, they can choose to starve themselves to death, which

would fall under to today's definition of passive euthanasia – nothing is done to prevent death.

In *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* there are other elements which come into the debate, because no longer is it simply a matter of having a physician administer an overdose of pain relieving drugs, which could bring about the so-called 'double effect', but rather, Ken is dependent on artificial life support. Yet again, there is no indication to believe that Linda is connected to any artificial means of life support. Ken's struggle is different in that he wishes to affirm his right to free will. Linda 'accepts' hers in her ignorant and blissful 'happiness', and the Utopians have a choice 'offered' to them without even having to ask. Regardless, I am inclined to believe that Ken's struggle, though distinct and idiosyncratic, runs parallel to that of the citizens of Utopia and those of the New World State, a discussion I shall give continuance to in the proceeding chapter.

Despite having a Beta as a mother, the Savage was brought up on a Reservation in New Mexico, and so his concept of death is on a higher plane of spiritual values: "the death of Linda serves to emphasize the intrinsic nature of the conflict between two essentially incompatible ways of life."[51] On the Reservation, science has not intervened in any manner, therefore individuals experience all of the withering physical and mental alterations that come with old age. To an outsider, or rather, to someone from the civilised world, ageing is a mysterious and unnatural plight. Both Bernard and Lenina's reactions at seeing a wrinkled, toothless, white-haired old Indian man is revealing:

> 'What's the matter with him?' whispered Lenina. Her eyes were wide with horror and amazement.
>
> 'He's old, that's all,' Bernard answered as carelessly as he could. He too was startled; but he made an effort to seem unmoved.
>
> 'Old?' she repeated. 'But the Director's old; lots of people are old; they're not like that'

[51] Bowering 109.

> ‘That’s because we don’t allow them to be like that. We preserve them from diseases. We keep their internal secretions artificially balanced at a youthful equilibrium. We don’t permit their magnesium-calcium ratio to fall below what it was at thirty. We give them transfusions of young blood. We keep their metabolism permanently stimulated. So, of course, they don’t look like that. Partly,’ he added, ‘because most of them die long before they reach this old creature’s age. Youth almost impaired till sixty, and then, crack! the end.’[52]

In the New World State, old age including the senilities, which normally accompany it, have been triumphed over. In the remote past belonging to the citizens of this brave new world, men would have enjoyed their retirement to read, turn to religion and think, despite the physical decomposition of old age. However, genetic engineering, and biochemical modifications (like preventative measures against diseases) have been fundamental in bringing about revolutionary changes. They are now kept continually youthful until they reach the age of sixty at which time their organism ‘breaks down’ and death is immediate. Until that moment, progress is such that: “the old men work, the old men copulate, the old men have no time, no leisure from pleasure, not a moment to sit down and think.”[53]

A Utopian, who has an incurable terminal disease and is suffering excruciating pain is given a choice whether to live or die. In the New World State, this situation would not even classify as hypothetical. Bernard is as baffled as he is appalled when he visits the Reservation: “ ‘old age, and disease … It’s almost inconceivable … I shall never understand’.”[54] In his world, most diseases, which habitually afflict mankind, have been done away with because of biological engineering. Death brought about by disease is practically unheard of. However, on one occasion, Lenina is unsettled and ends up unsure whether or not she injected a bottled embryo with its sleeping-sickness injection, the result will prove

[52] Huxley, *World* 99.
[53] Huxley, *World* 49.
[54] Huxley, *World* 111.

to be fatal: "Twenty-two years eight months and four days from that moment, a promising young Alpha-Minus administrator at Mwanza-Mwanza was to die of trypanosomiasis – the first case for over half a century."[55]

By obliterating old age, disease and the fear of death, the rulers of *Brave New World* believe they have destroyed spiritual values, as well as uprooted any need for God. The World Controller reads an excerpt from the philosopher Maine de Biran to substantiate his point:

> A man grows old; he feels in himself that radical sense of weakness, of listlessness, of discomfort, which accompanies the advance of age … imagining himself merely sick … old age; … a horrible disease it is … it is the fear of death and of what comes after death that makes men turn to religion as they advance in years … the religious sentiment tends to develop as we grow older … as the passions grow calm … our reason becomes … less obscured by the images, desires and distractions, in which it used to be absorbed; whereupon God emerges … our soul feels, sees, turns towards the source of all light; … we feel the need to lean on something that abides … we inevitably turn to God; for this religious sentiment is of its nature so pure .. that it makes up to us for all our other losses.[56]

However, for those living in the New World State, there are no losses to be made up for. If youthful desires and good health remain to the end, it is not necessary to find substitutes, thereby rendering religious sentiment superfluous. Thus, if God is held as being superfluous, then the ethical values which a society habitually hails and honours, like chastity and nobility, as well as the rituals associated with the act of dying, are also superfluous. It is absolutely unnecessary for any individual in the civilised new world to have to endure anything that is disagreeable. Mustapha Mond sums it up: "God isn't compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness."[57] In spite of so much happiness,

[55] Huxley, *World* 170.
[56] Huxley, *World* 213.
[57] Huxley, *World* 214.

the Savage cannot find nobility: he can see no advantage in the fear of old age or death having been removed; he sees his mother's death in a hospital, which seems more like a cross between a first-class hotel and a feely place, falling nothing short of hypocritical and dishonest. Therefore, he prefers the inconveniencies of life to the false comforts of civilisation: " 'But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin'. "[58] He realises that it is better to know the horrors of death and old age than to be completely drugged out of that knowledge. In essence, he claims the right to be unhappy – to be 'human'.

In *Brave New World* the individual has been made a slave to science: "Wells foresaw a scientific utopia based on science as a love of truth and knowledge for its own sake; in Huxley's utopia, science has degenerated into an instrument of power."[59] He goes on to express his apprehension at the rate with which science has become increasingly tied to the pursuit of power. It is a power that is extending itself over the physical world. Should it be placed in the hands of unstable and unscrupulous men, it is potentially dangerous. The danger lies in using power of knowledge for the sake of acquiring more power and not using power for the sake of good. This question of wielding scientific power over an individual is particularly relevant to Ken's situation in *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* because he has to confront the authoritative and all powerful hospital administration and a few medical doctors who demand to have the last say in any matter that concerns their work as professionals.

It is the power to determine how the individual lives his life and, ultimately, his death. In *Brave New World*, not only does scientific conditioning aim at making people like their inescapable social destiny, but it also makes them accept their death. Actually, it is rather curious, and decidedly apathetic, the manner in which citizens of the New World State refer to death. The 'choice' of words demonstrates this. They go from Bernard's "Youth almost unimpaired till

[58] Huxley, *World* 219.
[59] Bowering 111.

sixty, and then, crack! the end," to Henry's "Going up in a squirt of hot gas," and to Dr Shaw's "popping off into eternity." Yet, their indifference ought not to be surprising because, after all, they have been subjected to years of conditioning.

3.3. "How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world / That has such people in't!"[60]

Chapter 12 in *Brave New World* is committed to the pursuit of intellectual meaning in the written word. There is an episode of particular interest for the euthanasia debate. The Savage is eagerly reading *Romeo and Juliet* to Helmholtz and Bernard, all the while imagining himself to be Romeo and Lenina Juliet. In announcing Shakespeare to the New World State, the Savage delivers a bit of culture into an otherwise cultureless society. All the art and knowledge of the past have been extinguished, although the World Controller Mustapha Mond still has a few pre-Fordian books safely stashed away in his study.

Helmholtz finds certain sentiments like 'passion' and 'love' somewhat perplexing and amusing, but he praises the "superb piece of emotional engineering," which is also ironic, because he is himself the result of emotional engineering.[61] However, what I would like to draw attention to in this small episode is that the very two things that render Helmholtz helpless and so break down in uncontrollable laughter is the mention of 'sweet mother' and: "Tybalt lying dead, but evidently uncremated and wasting his phosphorous on a dim monument."[62] Notwithstanding the evident curiosity that Helmholtz has in regards to creativity, he is unable to break free from many years of conditioning. Although the words that Shakespeare has so gracefully put together with such delightfully pleasing rhythms and rhymes appeal to him, he cannot understand the

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[60] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed., Stanley Wells *et. al.*, *William Shakespeare. The Complete Works*, ed. John Dover Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2005) 1241. I have already spoken about suicide in Shakespeare's plays earlier on in this study on pages 44-45.
[61] Huxley, *World* 166.
[62] Huxley, *World* 167.

foolishness and absurdity, firstly of 'motherhood' and secondly that so much phosphorous should go to waste. In his world, death is as detached as is life, because the individual is insignificant.

It may just be pure coincidence, but, of Shakespeare's plays that Huxley quotes from in *Brave New World* four have suicides – *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* – giving a further fatalistic gloom to the final climax. The last scenes of Huxley's novel are of an absolute madness, which will lead the Savage himself to commit suicide. Ironically, though *Brave New World* is praised as being a prophetic vision of the future, the Savage's plight is an age old one, of an individual who fails to find his niche in a greater society. The Savage does not see happiness in the flood of civilisation if it means not having religion, literature, poetry, dignity and values. The discussion of all this, which is in essence on happiness and its nature in society, takes place between Mustapha Mond and the Savage, filling the core of the novel.

3.4. "Rams Wrapped in Thermogene Beget no Lambs"[63]

In Sparta and other City States of classical Greece weak or deformed babies were exposed, the practice meeting with the approval of both Aristotle and Plato. In the *Republic*, Plato went even further and advocated eugenic breeding. He stated that if men and women, who were considered unfit 'specimens' for, or who were unworthy of procreation, perchance had children, then these were removed secretly but efficiently never to be seen again. His influence can be traced throughout the course of English literature and one such work that springs to mind now is Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*. In *Erewhon*, those who are ill, crippled or invalid get very little or no sympathy and are compelled to practise euthanasia

[63] Huxley, *World* 3. The traditional proverb "rams beget no lambs" is a warning against those people who try to do things, knowing full well that it is contrary to their nature. I believe Huxley might have used it to invoke the idea that artificial conditioning is contrary to nature, and therefore dangerous.

by lying down under a certain tree.[64] The same applies to anyone who exceeds a statutory age-limit. They test their children's reactions in infancy, by sending them off for joyrides on the backs of large birds: if the baby is airsick or terrified, they regard it as substandard, and expose it. As in Plato's *Republic*, women and children are public property. Unfortunately, since Plato's introduction of eugenics in the *Republic* many centuries ago, the concept has been distorted and put to insidious means. It is argued that Hitler echoed Plato in his defence of eugenics in Nazi Germany, where 'defective' people – those with mental or physical disabilities or illness of any sort – were not allowed to reproduce, but worse still, were simply killed.

Brave New World opens up with a lengthy description of a human embryo factory, where eggs are painstakingly tended to by mass-production methods. These eggs move progressively along a conveyor belt, receiving specific applications and treatments of conditioning at differing intervals; for instance future rocket-plane engineers are conditioned to associate being upside down with well-being. In Huxley's dystopia, eugenics has triumphed to the point where babies are "decanted" in accordance with society's needs. At the top of this hierarchical class structure is the future elite of society, the Alphas, followed by Betas and so on right down to the lowly Epsilons. Regardless of being at the bottom of this pyramid, the Epsilons, like all other groups are conditioned to accept their fate with the same amount of happiness, even if they do only wear khaki.

Advanced biological engineering has been taken to a higher level in its application in human reproduction. The prospect seems frightening. But it is worthwhile to bear in mind that we are now in an era when it is possible for a woman, who does not wish to conceive via natural means, to visit a local sperm bank, sit comfortably in an agreeable setting and leaf through a dozen or so catalogues to 'select' what will be her child. She may make her decision based on

[64] *Erewhon*, an anagram of 'nowhere', is a satirical novel which Samuel Butler (1835-1902) published anonymously in 1872.

a range of characteristics from eye colour to height or to the level of intelligence. I may be exaggerating on the casualness of the whole procedure, but just how far? If it is possible to select physical and mental characteristics of an individual, then ought it to be possible to select the characteristics of an individual's death?

It is an entire caste system that has been created in order to achieve social stability: "The principle of mass production at last applied to biology."[65] Essentially, they are bred to fulfil a social role. The Utopians, who are not 'decanted' like the citizens of the New World State, also work en-masse for the common good of society. In *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* Ken criticises the hospital industry where nurses and other medical staff are supposedly also produced en-masse and are trained (ultimately conditioned) to 'handle' patients accordingly. In other words, there is no room for affection or dignity, because a patient who finds himself in a complicated medical condition like Ken ends up very often by being patronised and ignored.

The family 'swapping' that goes on the island of Utopia is suggestive of a military like community in which closeness between family members is not in the least bit encouraged. In choosing a husband the Utopians let themselves be guided by the principles of eugenics. For, the main objective of such a society is for the individual to work for the greater good of society. Therefore, idleness is not tolerated. Everyone must be useful, so when illness (grave enough to call upon an early death) calls that citizen is no longer of any use to the society as a whole. There is no great consternation or upset if that individual chooses to 'depart' earlier. Certainly, his pain is seen as intolerable and his insistence to fight the illness futile, essentially he has become "unfit for any of life's duties … a burden to himself and to others."[66]

In *Brave New World* men and women no longer have intercourse in order to procreate because it is all done artificially. Indeed, it is considered quite repugnant for a woman to bear a child and the main reason why Linda is caste

[65] Huxley, *World* 5.
[66] More, *Utopia* 60.

aside by society upon her return to civilisation. Furthermore, inter-family relationships are not encouraged, firstly, because there is no genetic tracing as eggs are hatched from the same batch and secondly, because it is not practical or functional. Emotional ties lead to complications and finally there is stability precisely because dependence on such ties has been eradicated. The family is not regarded as a factor of stability in society, contrarily so, for it is seen to provide ample opportunities for the build up of emotions.

Therefore, in *Brave New World*, the family unit has been done away with and replaced by the breeding bottle and the state nursery. Promiscuity, with a constant near-at-hand supply of contraceptives, is wholeheartedly encouraged. The purpose behind promiscuous sex is twofold: it renders all the sentiments normally associated with meaningful relationships completely superfluous and assures that there is no sense of the unique value of another – "all that remains is a search for purely physical pleasure, with T.S. Eliot's 'pneumatic' providing the only adjective of commendation available to describe a woman's charms."[67] But, what if the contraceptives should fail to work and a woman were to fall pregnant? It happened to Linda, but unlike other fertile Beta women in the New World State, she was stuck out in the Savage Reservation and therefore did not have access to the beautifully decorated flood-lit Abortion Centre in Chelsea. Not only would having a baby be a revolting prospect for any young woman in the new state, but it would also go against all policies of the state, which practises eugenics.

Interestingly, these are the top three in current day major issues: eugenics, abortion and euthanasia. Today, those who maintain that non-voluntary euthanasia is permissible commonly use the eugenic argument in order to justify their case. The individuals, for whom euthanasia is proposed, represent genetic elements which are regarded as unacceptable if the purity of the human race is to be

[67] Philip Thody, *Aldous Huxley: A Bibliographical Introduction* (London: Studio Vista, 1973) 55.

maintained and improved. The removal of these individuals by euthanasia is therefore justified on eugenic grounds.[68]

The Savage, a romantic idealist in a controlled society, presents the opposition that the novel needed. He is clearly horrified by the civilised world of the New State and in no way approves of the indifferent and artificial manner in which his mother exits life. Essentially, she is 'put to sleep' like some stray and unwanted animal, in order to relieve the state of her miserable existence. Huxley, like Orwell, concludes his fantasy with a disquieting statement regarding human will, with the Savage's submission to World State society leading to his suicide. Brander describes the Savage's plight as "the parable of the individual in the mass community."[69]

According to May: "The farce at the Park Lane Hospital is a means of attending once again to the problem of whether death really is the conquest of the soul by the body."[70] May goes on to state the reasons for Huxley's use of farce for providing both the hectic climax of many prior absurdities and it expresses ambiguities. The actions of the Savage, who shoves a child to the floor in the hospital and once outside he throws the little pill-boxes of *soma* tablets in handfuls, are as rash as the actions of the scientifically-conditioned citizens of this civilised new world. John is not wrong in his principle to hold on to spiritual values, but he is holding on to the wrong values. The citizens of this 'brave new world' are also not wrong in principle to do away with the torments and suffering of death, but they have done away with them in the wrong ways. It is not immediately clear what Huxley is seeking. Would it be valid to say that he is searching for other ways to confront death and all the fears that normally shroud

[68] Non-voluntary euthanasia can be proposed for two groups: those in whom the cause of their inability to consent has been present from birth (infants born seriously deformed and severely mentally retarded older people, that is, people never capable of a choice); and those in whom this inability has arisen in the course of a life which was previously 'normal' (people who once were able to choose whether to live or die, but now because of an accident or the onset of senility have permanently lost the ability to choose).
[69] Brander 66.
[70] May 112.

it? Is there happiness in dying? Perhaps the following quote taken from Laura Archera Huxley's biographical work can shed some light. She writes:

> There are two diametrically opposite views about dying. One is the best way to go without knowing it, to slip away – hopefully when sleeping. The other view – less prevalent but more spiritually enlightened – is that one should die as aware and clear-minded as possible; that death is one of the great adventures of life, and one should not miss it or block it by unconsciousness. In this view, it is thought that the future life of the "soul" or "consciousness" or "mind" (whatever word one uses for that which pervades the body and gives it life) is influenced to a great extent by the thoughts and feelings at the moment of death … Aldous believed in the latter.[71]

In truth, from a very early age, Huxley was confronted with physical suffering and death, which may help to explain much of the cynicism and bitterness in his work. The death of his mother (brought about by cancer) had tremendous impact on him, which could only be expected because he was only five at the time. A mere two years later, while Huxley was at Eton, he contracted an eye infection which left his vision seriously impaired for the rest of his life. Thody affirms that: "Not one of Huxley's novels is without the obsession of what the flesh can do to the spirit when what man regards as the normal balance of nature is upset ... he was appalled by death, suffering and decay."[72] In 1914, his brother Noel Trevenen Huxley hanged himself. According to Thody, one of the outcomes of all this suffering is that the potentially tragic conflict between ideals and reality became another major theme in Huxley's work, along with the inevitability of the spirit succumbing to the weaknesses of the flesh. Medicine was not able to save his mother from an agonising death, nor was it able to cure him of the awful temporary blindness that afflicted him. Neither man's intellect nor his

[71] Laura Archera Huxley, *This Timeless Moment* (London: Chatto, 1968) 262.
[72] Thody 7-8.

moral consciousness is able to shield him from the casual callousness of his own body.

Thus is Ken's harsh reality in *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*. His creativity and intellectualism have become incarcerated in his own body. He is unable to express himself physically and therefore his whole existence becomes unbearable, undignified and meaningless. He is totally dependent on others for his every need and he has to be rolled over or he will rot away from bedsores. The simple pleasures that the Utopians hold so highly are not within his physical reality: "as when we move our bowels, generate children, or relieve an itch."[73] Would it be plausible to argue that in Ken's case, his choice to die is an inevitable sign of his "spirit succumbing to the weakness of the flesh?" Those in the New World State live purely for physical pleasure, sex is loveless and certainly not for means of procreation. Ken cannot imagine himself developing a fulfilling relationship with a woman on any level, although he admits to still having tremendous sexual desire. For starters, he fears that he is no longer physically desirable. Indeed, even though his personality is quite appealing, he loses any edge the minute it is made evident that he cannot carry out the necessary steps in the seduction game. He finds himself unable to enjoy the simple pleasures of feeding himself, so certainly he cannot take pleasure in the act of making love, even if it was purely physical. That possibility has been torn from him too.

No longer does Ken's body obey his mind. He has not been conditioned nor does he have to take *soma*, but he is in risk of 'losing' his mind because of the tranquillisers that the doctors insist in injecting him with. Although their intentions may be noble, as far as medical ethics are concerned, a physician must strive to make his patient feel as comfortable as possible. In Ken's case, they feel that his capacity to think and thereby contemplate his 'situation' could lead to depression. However, there is also the other side to the coin, because in keeping Ken tranquillised, he is kept silent and they are not reminded as often of their

[73] More, *Utopia* 54.

inadequacies. Naturally, it is no fault of any physician that Ken finds himself in his debilitated medical condition, certainly if it had not been for their quick action he might have died. So that is not the real issue here, because the physicians are actually pleased with their 'accomplishment' in having saved Ken, despite his consequential physical incapacities. What Clark is putting forward for discussion is: what right do medical authorities have over an individual to choose what to make of his life? It is about the greater almighty authority wielding its power over the weaker individual.

Unlike the Utopians who have priests to advise them on the best course of action, ultimately leaving the choice up to the individual, Ken has only his mind. He has to use the means that are available to him to fight for the right to express his will. It comes more easily to the Utopians. Naturally, I am not contemplating any of More's hidden agenda in this discussion but merely supposing that Utopia exists as a sovereign state in which euthanasia is legal. The inhabitants of the New World State do not have any of the preoccupations of having to decide whether or not to continue life under such complicated physical conditions, for *soma* would guarantee them a lengthy holiday away from reality: "for a dark eternity on the moon."[74] A holiday, they would surely never come back from unless it were out a chimney in the form of phosphorous, because then they would really be useful to society and not lying down rendered useless in a hospital bed. It would be a waste of resources and money.

3.5. "Big Brother is Watching You"[75]

The skills that are required in conditioning humanity remained an issue of particular interest for Huxley throughout his life, being plainly discernable in his academic work. The nightmarish scenario presented in *Brave New World* is especially reflective of the mood of an era. According to Brander, Huxley's novel

[74] Huxley, *World* 49.
[75] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 3.

is "a reaction to the growth of Mass Man, and the masses have grown more menacing year by year." [76] In *Brave New World*, Huxley is addressing particularly the fear of overpopulation, which since then has become particularly disturbing. Indeed, at present, we are living in an age of masses: mass production, mass destruction, mass media, mass hysteria, mass unemployment, mass murder, and so forth.[77]

High modernist utopias are stratified, as is also the case with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The common run-of-the-mill people are easily made slaves to science. They lead meaningless lives, as machines and scientific advancement have robbed them of their imaginations, their capacity to think for themselves and to feel. The rulers of the New World State, whose citizens have been subjected to relentless scrutiny and methodical conditioning, are thus free to do as they very well please, in full knowledge that the masses are unable to dissent. Under the influence of *soma* throughout their entire life times, the masses trudge happily along carrying out their various tasks for the higher good of society and stability. The Savage, who is confronted with such masses, whose integrity and individuality have been hollowed out by a totalitarian state, is unable to cope and thus finds his only release in death.

Right-to-life campaigners point to the dangers of such totalitarian states whose main objective is to repress the masses. An individual, enveloped in the impersonality of machines and the bureaucratic processes that characterise such systems, is sure to forfeit his individuality and right to self-determination. According to opponents of the legalisation of euthanasia the very concept of freedom is already fading, the decision of some countries, like the Netherlands and Belgium, to legalise passive euthanasia has taken "one step further to conditioning society to accept the elimination of all inconvenient persons."[78] Increasing pressures of over-population, advancing medical technology and what

[76] Laurence Brander, *Aldous Huxley: A Critical Study* (Lewisberg: Bucknell UP, 1970) 61.
[77] Amazingly, the dictionary entry on 'mass' and its derivatives is quite prolific. I mention a mere 6 of the amazing 12 entries.
[78] See the Official Vatican web page.

Huxley termed as "poisonous propaganda"[79] will render the best of constitutions and preventative laws powerless.

Utopias are imaginary no-places, implying by the name that they cannot exist but were created by idealists who sought to form the world in a way appealing to them, regardless of the implications to humankind. Some of the greatest atrocities have been committed in the name of utopia. But, this is not always the case, for some utopias have been created simply in reaction to others who have ventured to expose such a possible ideal state. Huxley's *Brave New World* was supposedly written as a satire of H.G. Well's *Island.* Yet, in his *Brave New World Revisited* he was able to express his alarm at the tremendous rate at which the prophecies he had made many years earlier were being fulfilled: difference

> The completely organized society, the scientific caste system, the abolition of free will by methodical conditioning, the servitude made acceptable by regular doses of chemically induced happiness, the orthodoxies drummed in by nightly courses of sleep-teaching – these things were coming all right, but not in my time, not even in the time of my grandchildren.[80]

Does *Brave New World* present us with a bleak image of the future? The quest for utopia does not seem unreasonable. Perhaps, one day, thousands of years of idealism will pay off.

[79] Huxley, *World Revisited* 86.
[80] Huxley, *World Revisited* 3.

IV

IN SEARCH OF A NEW JERUSALEM

One of the features that More's *Utopia* and Huxley's *Brave New World* have in common, despite standing on opposite ends of the realm of fantasy and exposing different social ideologies, is the fundamental requirement that conditions of hygiene and health are far better than in their own existing worlds. Miriam Eliav-Feldon writes that: "A New Jerusalem cannot be built without an effective sewage system."[1] For, if disease and foulness are present in More's utopian society, neither simple nor greater pleasures are attainable. And, in Huxley's counter utopia, collective happiness, even if at the cost of individual freedom, is impossible. It may seem peculiar that such practical matters as the disposal of waste, cleanliness or good eating habits are even dealt with at all. Yet, throughout *Utopia*, there are numerous examples to pick from, and most, no doubt are still totally sound by today's standards: "Their lunches are light … which they think particularly helpful to good digestion."[2] Certainly, good hygiene and better eating habits would have played a crucial role (back at the time More was writing *Utopia*) in averting much disease and death.

Brave New World opens with an enormous emphasis on sterilisation and cleanliness, as may be gathered immediately on the first page: "shining porcelain of a laboratory … the overalls of the workers were white, their hands gloved … the polished tubes."[3] The citizens of the New World state are most particular about personal hygiene and are forever taking baths, getting dusted with fine

[1] Miriam Eliav-Feldon, *Realistic Utopias: The Ideal Imaginary Societies of the Renaissance 1516-1630*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982) 31. Not wishing to cause gross injustice to the rest of Eliav-Feldon's superb study, but for my present purpose and discussion, the second chapter of this book entitled "Lands of Health" (31-55) provides further enlightening reading, in that it addresses the issue that good health is the bedrock of any ideal society, if it is to function.
[2] More, *Utopia* 44. I have already referred to other examples of health and hygiene that are to be found in *Utopia.*
[3] Huxley, *World* 1.

talcum powder, being squirted with eight different scents of eau-de-Cologne and enjoying vibro-vacuum machines. Their tolerance to filth and squalor is very low indeed, which is made all the more evident when Lenina and Bernard are at the Savage Reservation: "The dirt … the piles of rubbish, the dust, the dogs, the flies. Her face wrinkled up into a grimace of disgust. She held her handkerchief to her nose."[4] Of course, her reaction could be nothing less than expected because of the hypnopaedic lessons in elementary hygiene: "cleanliness is next to fordliness … and civilization is sterilization."[5] However, the emphasis that is laid on being clean and presentable does not only have to with preventing infection and avoiding illness, because most of those problems have already been taken care of thanks to genetic manipulation and scientific advances. There is another reason, which contributes just as significantly to stability, and that is the satiation of sexual appetite. And, in such a society where promiscuity is explored and stimulated from a very young age, physical appearance is paramount for there to be any attraction. The citizens of this society have been bred under eugenic specifications. For any citizen of the New World state, therefore, an ageing body complete with wrinkles and drooping skin is horribly unsightly, unfathomable, and imperfect.

Sadly, today's Western world has placed tremendous value on physical appearance, and more and more people are being discriminated because they do not meet the prerequisites of perfection and beauty. The last few decades have seen phenomenal increases in memberships at gymnasiums, health spas, and so forth. On the one hand, it is optimistic to behold that people are becoming more aware that a healthy body does indeed contribute to a healthy mind. On the other hand, much of this concern can probably be attributed to the high demands that society is placing on physical appearance in an ever-increasingly competitive world. However, Huxley's portrayal of a society that is overly concerned and

[4] Huxley, *World* 98.
[5] Huxley, *World* 98. Once again, Huxley has taken the well-known proverb "cleanliness is next to godliness" and moulded it to suit the needs of this society's deity – Ford.

quasi-fanatical with the perfect and healthy body is not all that prophetic. At the beginning of the first millennium of the Christian Era, Seneca was already commenting on the wastefulness of taking up too much time with excessive exercise: "Devotees of physical culture have to put up with a lot of nuisances. There are the exercises, in the first place, the toil involved in which drains the vitality and renders it unfit for concentration or the more demanding sort of studies."[6] He favoured that the body be exercised but that room also be made for the spirit.

Although *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* does not fit neatly into the traditional wrapping of the utopian genre, it is also exploring the boundaries of society. According to Eliav-Feldon,

> A utopia is an invitation to perceive the distance between things as they are and things as they should be. It is a presentation of a positive and possible alternative to the social reality … since it is an appeal to perfect the social environment, it expresses explicit and implicit criticism of the things as they are.[7]

It might then be possible to assert that just as utopias are valuable sources of information, which disclose the opinions and feelings of contemporaries regarding the facts and problems of their era, so too might *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* be seen in a similar light. For, it also expresses a possible alternative to Clark's social reality, more exactly, that modern medical technology is encroaching into the individual's freedom to decide his own demise. Whether or not Ken's final decision is a positive alternative to the social reality is left for the audience to assess. And, in doing so, it serves its purpose: to bring an issue out into the open where it can be discussed transparently, honestly and enthusiastically.

Although the concern with cleanliness and hygiene has not been given a pivotal role in the play, for one takes for granted that such measures would

[6] Seneca XV: 60.
[7] Eliav-Felden 1.

evidently be implemented, the value of physical appearance in Ken's society has been given a fair amount of relevance though it may not come to the surface straight away. It is subtle, but very much present. Traditionally, the concept of beauty depends on a series of factors, which despite stimulating much delightful conversation would be too time consuming at this present stage in the study. Nonetheless, my main reason for drawing on this is that, as unsympathetic as it may sound, people with physical 'flaws' do not habitually fall into such categories. Bernard in *Brave New World* is thought odd because of his minor 'defect' – he is shorter than others of his own caste. Ken is only to aware that he will not be thought attractive, at least not sexually, to a woman because of his somewhat bigger 'defect' – he is paralysed form the neck down. Both these characters manage to gather some sympathy, and Bernard comes out luckier, because he at least lives in a promiscuous society and his 'defect', of course, is no deterrent to achieving sexual pleasure once under the happy influence of *soma*.

It is an important fact to bear in mind that *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* is first and foremost a stage play written to be performed in front of an audience. Thus, three aspects ought to be contemplated. Firstly, it is worthwhile to consider the events taking place on the world's larger stage. Secondly, the interaction between performers and audience is undeniably crucial to getting the desired reaction, and thirdly, the manner in which the play is directed is also of the essence. Therefore, and puns aside, the stage must first be set before proceeding any further.

4.1. The World Stage.

It is not an easy task to pick a path through the minefield of the euthanasia debate. In order to understand the secular drive for the liberalisation of euthanasia, it would be worthwhile to bear in mind the contributions made by ancient (and religious) thought, which has already been addressed in an earlier chapter. It would also be necessary to tease out the inconsistencies and fundamental beliefs in standard responses to the dilemmas at the edge of life. It would be equally

invaluable to clarify emotional issues. Thus far, this study has been mostly concerned with the moral and cultural aspects that are addressed in literature without tangling with the law as such. I am not proposing any in-depth analysis of the euthanasia debate within the immense waters of the law. In this particular part of the debate, the reason for my dipping into those very deep waters, even if fleetingly, is twofold. Firstly, following traditional religious principles, Western laws have generally treated the act of assisting someone in dying as a form of punishable unlawful killing (normally termed as 'homicide'). In modern times, however, laws have become more secular and those who advocate the legalisation of euthanasia have argued that, under principles of individual liberty, individuals have a legal right to die as they choose. Regardless of uncountable campaigns and victories, for other rights movements, such as the right to abortion and the right to homosexual marriages, among others, most countries have not fully adopted this position on euthanasia preferring to retain restrictions. Secondly, it provides the groundwork for the ensuing (more literary-orientated) discussion on *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*.

The first organisations to promote the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia in the United Kingdom and the United States of America were formed in the 1930s, but they remained small and had little impact. The 1960s saw many significant amendments to English law. For starters, the law against suicide was repealed in 1961 when the Suicide Act was passed, perhaps because it was felt that private acts which do not pose a threat to others are not the law's concern, or perhaps, because of the irrationality in attempting to deter a potential suicide with the threat of punishment. Another important enactment was the 1967 Abortion Act, which allowed women to have abortions uncontested. Thus, the 1970s was ushered in under a hub of exciting public debate over the weighty subject of whose rights reigned supreme: those of the state or those of the individual.

Indeed, present day activists on both side of the euthanasia fence tend to agree that the 1970s was the period, which saw the true resurrection of public interest in the euthanasia debate, for the Western world once more embraced the

subject of death with a fervour that could not have been predicted ten or fifteen years earlier. As laws have evolved from their traditional religious underpinnings, certain forms of euthanasia have been legally accepted, although overall, these laws attempt to draw a line between passive euthanasia and active euthanasia.[8] Previously, it was widely taken for granted that a physician's duty was to save lives whenever it was deemed possible. There were, however, those physicians who took it upon themselves to be accommodating when judging whether it was worthwhile to continue the struggle to save a life or whether the patient should be simply allowed to pass away. Even so, the assumption that a physician's duty was to save life superseded all other considerations, so much so that the patient was no longer asked for an opinion. Furthermore, physicians were being increasingly provided with the power of modern medical technology to prolong life.[9] In the 1960s and 1970s, such medical advances were keeping patients, who had no prospects of recovery, alive long past the point at which, under previous circumstances, would have died. Consequently, patients, and in instances where patients could not state their own opinion, their families began to demand more of

[8] This is a matter that I have already addressed earlier on in far more detail on pages 45 to 50. In the Netherlands and Belgium voluntary euthanasia is now legal. In Belgium, just as recently as March 2005, euthanasia kits were made available for about €60 at designated chemists throughout the country, where only physicians are able to pick up the kit in person 24 hours after making the order. At first, it may seem pretty bizarre, but the stoical reasoning behind such measures is that it is in fact quite practical and efficient because, it permits the physician to have the right dosage for the procedure, should the patient wish to die at home. Physician-assisted suicide (in which the physician may prescribe, but not administer, a lethal dose of drug to a terminally ill patient) is permitted in Switzerland and the American State of Oregon. In other countries, it goes against the law, although it does not mean that it does not happen. For instance, the 'double effect' principle allows physicians to give terminally ill patients large doses of drugs, like morphine, which will have a lethal outcome for the patient. Another matter, which has been the cause of much ink to run, is that of 'living wills'. In English courts, such advance instructions as 'living wills' are not used as valid evidence, although sometimes sympathy is given. But, these are particularly harrowing and intricate debates which bioethicists and many other modern thinkers are currently disputing.

[9] Naturally, it is also important to bear in mind that there is always the other side to the coin, and this particular matter is no exception. For, while the medical profession was being attacked by those who wished to determine whether or not they wished to continue being treated, individual physicians and medical institutions were being taken to court for supposed malpractice. To do nothing and let nature take its course could have dire consequences, professionally and personally.

a say in how they were treated. These ingredients were added to an already simmering movement for patients' rights.

At the moment, it is legal for physicians in England (who have the consent of the patient or his family) to practise passive euthanasia, which is withholding treatment or life-support even if it means the person will die. However, it remains illegal for physicians to practise any other kind of euthanasia, which involves directly helping patients end their lives. Nonetheless, since the early 1970s there have been cases where people have been prosecuted for practising active euthanasia. Curiously, the courts seem to come down harder on physicians who have taken a patient's life, despite the patient's consent. And, in cases where the person, who took the life of another suffering intolerable pain, is somehow related or has been nursing the patient for a long time, the law seems to soften slightly. The conviction can be lessened from murder to manslaughter. Perhaps, it ought not to be so curious. Perhaps, it is the traditional ethic of the sanctity of human life that is under challenge. Fundamentally,

> What attitude should we take to advances in science and technology that develop new forms of life, seek to increase our intelligence beyond the normal human range, or bring us closer to the ancient dream of immortality? If we enter politics, should we regard the usual moral rules as suspended, because we cannot gain power without compromising our principles, and without power we can accomplish nothing?[10]

Although the English government recognises a patient's right to choose whether or not to discontinue his treatment, medical technology increasingly

[10] Peter Singer, and Renata Singer, eds., *The Moral of the Story: An Anthology of Ethics through Literature*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) xiii.

appears to blur the boundaries between life and death.[11]

4.2. Setting the Stage for *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*

In 1978, *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* staged its first performance at the Mermaid Theatre with Tom Conti playing the part of Ken Harrison. Due to Ken's paralysis and the issues upon which the play itself hinged, the director Michael Lindsay-Hogg was obliged to give considerable thought to the actual positioning of props and where the different scenes were to take place. He seems to have taken an interesting, and particularly effective, approach of keeping Ken on stage throughout the entire performance, in the hopes of impressing the realism of Ken's greatly limited physical condition upon the audience. Unable to express his emotions through effective body language, as a result of the severe injuries he has sustained, Ken's ability to relate with the audience is seriously hindered, and is no doubt a challenging role for Conti.

However, facial expression and tone of voice remain at his disposal, and he must preside good control over these features to compensate for his lack of body language, and successfully implement these to an effective end. It cannot be an easy task, because Ken has to transmit a comprehensive range of emotions. For starters, there are all the sexual innuendos aimed at the nurses and Doctor Scott. Ken's insinuations do not always carry the same amount of emotional charge, for he uses them to extract different results. When he teases Sister Anderson, his motivations are not the same as when he addresses Doctor Scott whom he finds sexually attractive. In the following excerpt she has just returned to the hospital

[11] The BMA holds the view that: "mentally competent and informed patients can refuse medical treatment … the BMA advises health professionals to provide information in a sensitive manner about the implications … ultimately, however, the patient's views must be respected." <www.bma.org.uk>. Regardless, the BMA also admits that it remains a particularly difficult area ethically and legally because there are cases as for instance when artificial nutrition is allowed to be withdrawn. Indeed, how can it be lawful to allow a patient to die slowly, although painlessly over a period of weeks from lack of food but unlawful to produce his immediate death by a lethal injection?

after having gone out for dinner with Ken's solicitor. The cheekiness in their interplay is telling:

> KEN. Well, well, well … The randy old devil. He didn't take long to get cracking did he?
> DR SCOTT. It was just a dinner.
> KEN. I know I engaged him to act for me. I didn't realise he would see his duties so comprehensively.
> DR SCOTT. It was just dinner!
> KEN. Well, I hope my surrogate self behaved myself.
> DR SCOTT. You were a perfect gentleman.
> KEN. Mm … then perhaps I'd better engage another surrogate.[12]

On the surface, it seems just more playful banter, but Ken's quips are loaded with sexual overtures, and perhaps even a hint of jealousy. This is typical of flirtatious adult conversation. The underlying message is successfully relayed. The attraction is there, but it is futile, which makes it all the more regrettable and frustrating for Ken.

It contrasts markedly with the scene in which Doctor Emerson injects Ken with a tranquilliser, and Ken shows just how irate he is. There are also the more humorous and witty exchanges between Ken and John as opposed to the more sarcastic and condescending tone he adopts when addressing Mrs Boyle: "Mrs Boyle, even educationalists have realised that the three r's do not make a full life."[13] Certainly, the high point in the play, in which he has to put forward his case to the judge in the hopes of being discharged, is particularly demanding. It has to be a smooth and controlled delivery, yet thoroughly convincing. After all, it is not only the judge that needs convincing but also an entire audience. How do you convince someone that it is reasonable to want to die?

[12] Clark 54.
[13] Clark 27.

The sexually laced exchanges between Nurse Sadler and John draws a closer contrast between their capacity to interrelate on a physical level and Ken's physically null reality. Clark has included these two characters with various ends in mind. The first has already been mentioned, and a second reason would be to allow moments for the audience to unwind and break momentarily from Ken's problems. However, their dialogue is cleverly structured permitting that in few words other views are expressed, and whereas John is more pragmatic and perhaps even blunt, Nurse Sadler tries to uphold some degree of professionalism, which Ken is always trying to penetrate because of her inexperience.

Ken's awkward physical posture demanded particular insight on the part of the director, because in order to take full advantage of Ken's voice and facial expressions, everything and everyone had to revolve around him, thereby making Ken's reality increasingly more striking throughout. Thus, another of Lindsay-Hogg's concerns was to give particular prominence to the fact that Ken is wholly dependent on the medical staff and machines. Should the catheter be removed, for instance, Ken would be poisoned by his own blood and die.[14] Lindsay-Hogg opted to have Ken centre-stage propped up by pillows on a typical hospital bed with rails on either side, where he remained throughout the entire performance. The other scenes in which Ken was not actively involved took place around his hospital room. Lighting was detrimental for it added to the mood as a whole:

> At the end of each scene with Ken, the lights would dim down gradually so as to cast shadows from the bed rails in such a way that they seemed shadows of prison

[14] In the film version, Ken's dependency on others is made particularly dramatic on various occasions, but there is one incident that stands out. The nurse is changing the bedding and his clothes, but she suddenly finds that she is unable to hold him up and he falls helplessly and somewhat violently to the floor. For the viewer, it is a moment of extreme anxiety because he does not even have the capacity to cover and protect his face, which would be the usual reaction of a person who is physically responsive. The message is received loud and clear.

> bars ... At the end, once his sentence had been read and Dr Scott turned to leave, the lights were held for some time and then quite abruptly, snapped out. The end. [15]

Certainly, it must have left the audience with a shudder, for in simply reading the play the effect is also very similar. The film version of *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* has an equally dramatic finale, leaving the viewer with the same horrid realisation that this man has just been condemned to death. It smacks of unfairness and cruelty. And, the voice of our unconsciousness seems to sigh disconcertingly, "I hope I never have to go through something like that."

4.3. Catch 22

Much has been written about people with disabilities and euthanasia. Active euthanasia – as the rational action of a mature and responsible adult – is at its most controversial in the cases of paraplegics and quadriplegics who wish to die but need the help of others in order to do so. When a person with such severe physical disabilities elects to end his life, immense questions arise, most of which are emotionally tinged. Is his death wish created by a desire to escape his appalling handicapped physical state with all its humiliations? Ken cannot carry out the elementary tasks of caring for his own basic needs: "Here is my substitute mum, with her porcelain pap. This isn't for me."[16] He is condemned to being spoon fed a lifetime of liquefied hospital food served in typical hospital porcelain dishes. That is not what he chooses.

Is such a path justified? Ken wishes to be discharged from hospital, but without medical technology he will surely die. But, he argues that he is dead

[15] Information of the first performance of *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* at the Mermaid Theatre can be found at <www.backstage.ac.uk>. The odd directions in the written version of the play also indicate that the lights are to be held for a long moment before snapping out. (76).
[16] Clark 55.

already: "I cannot accept this condition constitutes life in any real sense at all."[17] Is he giving up too easily? Ken is resolutely unwilling to try out the occupational therapy that Mrs Boyle recommends. Ken has no friendly Utopian visitor who offers comfort and sound counsel. The hospital administration has provided him with a professional visitor Mrs Boyle. However, as her name seems to suggest she does not offer any solace; contrarily, her professionalism afflicts him like a troublesome and nagging boil. Furthermore, he also decides to "release" his fiancée from the guilt she would feel if she did what she really wanted to, and his parents have conformed to the idea of his wish to be discharged, which ultimately means his death. Would his accelerated death send other people with serious disabilities a message that struggling against the odds is pointless?

Contrary to popular belief, people with physical disabilities do not necessarily suffer from ill health, nor are they all on life long crusades wanting to end their lives. Nevertheless, when occasionally an individual in such circumstances manifests the desire to end his life, society finds itself on the horns of a dilemma, because while suicide is no longer considered a crime, aiding someone to die is.[18] Even those with such disabilities seem divided in assessing whether or not such ends are justified. Overall, most present-day groups representing the interests of people with disabilities are of the opinion that the

[17] Clark 72.

[18] Since the 1970s, euthanasia has become one of the fieriest debates in society, and as could only be expected, the glamour and glitterati of filmmaking has had its share of adding wood to the fire. As recently as 2004, Hollywood awarded *Million Dollar Baby* with an Oscar for best film of the year. *Million Dollar Baby* portrays Clint Eastwood as a sixty- year old staunch Catholic carrying out the death wish of a young female boxer. She has been seriously injured in a boxing accident and besides having been rendered a quadriplegic she is also permanently connected to life support. It is a straightforward case of voluntary-active euthanasia. While some critics have acclaimed the film's outstanding portrayal of an individual's right to free will and the courage of another to carry out that wish, other critics have attacked the film as morally reprehensible. On the night of the Oscars 2004, *Mar adentro* won the Oscar for best foreign film, which is also about a man's battle to terminate his life. However, unlike the fictional character of Maggie Fitzgerald in *Million Dollar Baby*, Ramón Sampedro was real, and his battle took other contours to Maggie's. For, Sampedro lived about forty years of his life as a quadriplegic until he reasonably and rationally decided that he had had enough and wished to die. Like many others before him, in similar circumstances to his own, he sought a legal outlet, but having been refused authorisation, he turned elsewhere. Ultimately, it is the issue of the right to choose our own demise that keeps coming insistently to the surface.

promulgation of euthanasia under such directives would not transmit an optimistic message, but rather one that suggests that life is not worth living.[19]

However, I do not believe that the message Clark meant to transmit was that people who find themselves with physical disabilities or even health problems are unable to lead fulfilling lives or contribute to the community:

> JUDGE. But wouldn't you agree that many people with appalling physical handicaps have overcome them and lived essentially creative, dignified lives?
> KEN. Yes, I would, but the dignity starts with their choice. If I choose to live, it would be appalling if society killed me. If I choose to die, it is equally appalling if society keeps me alive.[20]

Rather, Clark is attempting to stimulate discussion on whose right it is to choose whether or not the life we lead is fulfilling, for what may be fulfilling and dignifying to one is not necessarily the case for another. Ken is unwilling to accept substitutes – love without sensuality is meaningless, work that is not sculpting is unfulfilling. He needs to feel that his creativity extends onto something tangible, and now that he has lost the use of his limbs, that is no longer possible. He cannot find dignity under such conditions. The Utopians "define virtue as living according to nature … [so] when a man obeys the dictates of reason in choosing one thing and avoiding another, he is following nature."[21] Similarly, in choosing one thing (to be discharged) to avoid another, (a lifetime of

[19] I have been conscientiously careful not to use terms when referring to Ken's physical condition that might be taken as discriminating or demeaning to people with physical disabilities. However, human nature is fallible, and any word which might come across as offensive is unintentional and deeply regretted. There are a number of interesting articles related to this issue available at the official website for the British Council of Disabled People, which is the United Kingdom's national organisation of the worldwide Disable People's Movement. (BCODP available at <http://www.bcodp.org.uk/>).
[20] Clark 74.
[21] More, *Utopia* 51. The Utopians happen to say 'virtue' and Ken says 'dignity' but these two words are interchangeable.

suffering in hospital facilities), is Ken not following a similar line of reasoning? Certainly, it is not nature that is keeping him alive, but society.

Clark has manipulated what is essentially the same array of words to convey very different points of view. Ken's society has yet to reach tacit consensus on whether or not to permit euthanasia, hence the catch 22 situation. For, if he chooses to live and society more specifically physicians, fail to do everything medically and humanly possible within their reach to save him, it is shameful and despicable. But, the opposite is also true, because if he chooses that he does not want all the advantages of modern medical advances to be enforced upon him, then it is just as shameful and despicable to disrespect and ignore his wishes.

In stark contrast, without the blessing of scientific advances, the very foundations of the New World state in *Brave New World* would shudder. Indeed, manipulation of the human gene pool and technological dependency are the very pillars of this society's stability. Both the individual (clearly because of his conditioning) and society (because of its status of power) expect the attainment of scientific progress to take precedence over individual will. Dr Shaw shows his scientific delight at having had the opportunity "to see an example of senility in a human being."[22] Furthermore, there is no individual will. And course, to contemplate such notions of an individual's dignity and his right to choose would be unorthodox. To think otherwise would be appalling. No longer is death decided by nature: "What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder."[23] Scientific advances have manipulated even death itself. For the Utopians and More's contemporaries this would constitute blasphemy. But, to those of the New World state it would be nothing more than like going to the feelies.

Fundamentally, Ken is demanding the right to *choose* whether or not to continue living such a life. He does not see anything undignified in choosing to live despite physical handicaps, if that is the individual's choice. In such an

[22] Huxley, *World* 140.
[23] Huxley, *World* 18.

instance it is dignified, because society has respected that choice. But, he argues that in removing an individual's choice, society is removing his dignity. It is a double edged blade cutting deeply both ways in the argument. Whose life is it anyway? Indeed, the play's title is the question which needs answering, and all further events are an attempt to answer it, but in fact, even more questions are raised. In serious illness, what means of treatment are we obliged to use and what are we not required to use? Under what circumstances is it acceptable to sustain an individual's life just because the technology is available? Ultimately, who has the authority to decide and based on what right? Where does society draw the line? This is merely the tip of the iceberg of a raging debate that stirred Clark's creative juices.

4.4. Society *Versus* Individual

While some rights can be waived or set aside, others may be thought too important ever to be relinquished even by a willing right-holder. Such fundamental rights would be those to life and liberty. It would usually be agreed that this principle invalidates a willingness to be sold into slavery despite the insistence of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus that his *will* was not enslaved.[24] However, whether it would invalidate the rational decision of a terminally ill person to request euthanasia is more problematic. To remain a moment longer with the idea of enslavement of the will, lets consider what Seneca writes: "Surely you can say … 'No slave am I!' At present, you unhappy creature, slave you are, slave to your fellow-men, slave to circumstance, and slave to life (for life itself is

[24] Epictetus lived in the second century of the Christian era. He held that health, pleasure and possessions to be of no account, and that virtue resided in the will which should direct man to abstain and endure. He wrote nothing himself; the *Encheiridion*, or collection of his principles, was compiled by his disciple Arrian. The *Encheiridion* was highly praised by Matthew Arnold, one of Huxley's great influences. See also Cooper 9.

slavery if the courage to die be absent.)"[25] It is this battle of an individual's will that I now hope to examine within the context of *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*.

This unpretentiously sized play is mostly promoting discussion about the amount of choice, free will and right to dignity that an individual has in his own life, and about medical and legal ethics surrounding these issues. It goes further still in challenging age old views on euthanasia and suicide, presented in the play most frequently through the words of the main character who, contrary to Seneca's words, does not have the courage to *live*, not under such irreversible circumstances. Ken states quite adamantly that: "for me life is over. I want it recognised because I can't do the things that I want to do."[26] The final scene is the play's climax, and Clark presents the discussion between Ken and the Judge without mushy sentimentalism, but rather, Ken responds to his plight with wit and clarity arguing his right to choose with power and persuasion:

> JUDGE. I cannot accept that it is undignified for society to devote resources to keeping someone alive. Surely it enhances that society.
>
> KEN. It is not undignified if the man wants to stay alive, but I must restate that the dignity starts with his choice. Without it, it is degrading because technology has taken over from human will. My Lord, if I cannot be a man, I do not wish to be a medical achievement. I'm fine … I am fine.[27]

In this brief exchange of words, Clark has skilfully brought together many pertinent and challenging issues, which continue to afflict society nearly thirty years after writing *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*. One of the main issues being addressed here is the mixed blessing of high technology within the sphere of

[25] Seneca LXXVII: 129.
[26] Clark 55.
[27] Clark 74.

modern medicine, and the threat of technology taking over from human will. Huxley's *Brave New World* has already given us a pungent whiff of what nastiness can come if society becomes completely dominated by technological power and no room is left for morals and emotions. The pros and cons of having medical technology at our disposal seem to take turns in outweighing each other, and no sign of consensus, great or small, seems to be near at hand. Therefore, I shall try to be as succinct as possible, and limit myself merely to those matters which are directly relevant to *Whose Like Is It Anyway?*.

Clark has successfully illustrated that due to the advances in medical treatment, life can now be artificially prolonged. Yet, the tendency to sustain life, simply because the technology is available, could be regarded as undignified and degrading to some individuals under these circumstances. The potential of medical technology for good and bad end results seems to be patent. It has become harder and harder to define what exactly constitutes extraordinary medical care. Accepting an artificial heart is clearly experimental and would be extraordinary; whereas the usage of a respirator or ventilator is oftentimes standard procedure to aid the patient's recovery.

On the one hand, Ken's argument is that should an individual wish to continue being treated but society denied him help or quite simply did not have the means to do so, it would be appalling. Sadly, this *does* happen nowadays, particularly in many third world countries. Through John, Clark is able to state this paradox:

> NURSE. Would you just let them die? People like Mr Harrison?
>
> JOHN. How much does it cost to keep him here? Hundreds of pounds a week.
>
> NURSE. That's not the point.

JOHN. In Africa children die of measles. It would cost only a few pounds to keep them alive. There's something crazy somewhere.

NURSE. That's wrong too – but it wouldn't help just letting Mr Harrison die.

JOHN. No.[28]

Indeed, it raises another key element in the current discussion regarding the legalisation of euthanasia: the ever-increasing cost of health care. Would legal euthanasia be seen as a cheaper alternative to the heavy demands on care made by certain types of patient? It is no small exaggeration to say that millions are spent. Quite unsurprisingly, there are no simple answers, and both movements for and against euthanasia are well aware of the predicament. It would be dreadful to impose on a patient: "a horrifying array of respirators, tracheal tubes, feeding tubes through the nose, and repeated violent cardiopulmonary resuscitation – all futile and in almost all cases contrary to the wishes of the patient and his family."[29] Yet, would it not be equally dreadful for anyone to argue that someone should die for social, economic, or any other reason? Mustapha Mond would dismiss such sentimentalist based reasoning with a whisk of the hand:

> civilization has absolutely no need for nobility or heroism. These things are symptoms of political inefficiency. In a properly organized society … nobody has any opportunities for being noble or heroic … Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality about in a bottle. Christianity without tears – that's what *soma* is.[30]

Whose Life Is It Anyway? reflects much of the present day tension between the more authoritative and powerful hospital, and an individual's will. External

[28] Clark 16.
[29] Chris Docker at www.exit.uk
[30] Huxley, *World* 216.

pressures, such as those exerted by hospital administrations and other kinds of bureaucracies, make it difficult if not impossible for individual physicians and others making the decisions to refrain from using life-prolonging technology, even when they think it is wrong to. Furthermore, hovering over any decision not to employ this technology is what Ladd aptly calls: "the brooding presence of medical liability."[31] Such social and legal factors encourage and reinforce the frequently ill-advised and indiscriminate use of life-saving equipment such as respirators to keep people alive. It seems then that new developments in medical technology and the rise of a new kind of medical professionalism have aggravated the moral dilemmas involved in such decisions. They show how the accompanying institutionalisation of medical care has affected the physician-patient relationship, in particular as regards providing care for the dying and making choices about death.

Utopians have representatives of the state and holy authorities go to the man who is suffering intolerably and allow *him* to choose. Bearing in mind that modern technology does not exist as we know it today on this island, evidence leads us to believe that things would be no different. Nonetheless, it would be pleasurably delightful to imagine what More would say to all this uproar today. Would he continue to support the Vatican's view which some extreme orthodox sects believe is too tolerant?[32] Unlike the Utopians, Ken is not given the choice voluntarily, because his society does not see his desire to die as being reasonable. Therefore, he must seek the "public officials" who will be willing to partake in his plea to the state. *Brave New World* has wrapped up the whole debate in a neat

[31] John Ladd, ed., *Ethical Issues Relating to Life and Death* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979) 5.

[32] The Vatican released a declaration on euthanasia on May 5, 1980 (approved by Pope John Paul II) stating that: "a patient may judge that the techniques implied impose … strain or suffering out of proportion with the benefits that he or she may gain from such techniques. Therefore one cannot impose on anyone the obligation to have recourse to a technique which is already in use but which carries a risk or is burdensome" (available at www.Vatican). Interestingly, the days prior to and after the death of Pope John Paul II, speculative dust was raised as to whether or not he had left express wishes not to be force-fed or connected to any means of life-support.

package, labelled it history and sent it nowhere. History is bunk, so it belongs nowhere. It has no place in the civilised world of the New World state.

Indisputably, fear of dying in the cold clutches of modern technology has greatly heightened public endorsement of voluntary euthanasia. In the past, physicians and nurses practised the art of healing without the advantages of modern medicine, and euthanasia was seldom requested because death came naturally and people would usually die at home. Should an occasion arise in which the dose with a 'double-effect' be deemed appropriate, the respective parties were in the privacy of their home and would thus be shielded from outside speculation or eventual prosecution. Clark is well aware of this medical dilemma:

> DR EMERSON. I don't know about other professions but I do
> know this one, medicine, is being seriously
> threatened because of the intervention of law.
> Patients are becoming so litigious that doctors will
> soon be afraid to offer any opinion or take any action at all.[33]

In *Utopia*, there are no such fears because any decision to end suffering is sanctioned by the highest and most respected authorities of the Utopian state: "[ensuring] that it will be a holy and a pious act."[34]

Nowadays, most of us have grown up knowing our parents well into our own middle age, and few of us have experienced the death of a friend or family member at such a close proximity as our own home. Pneumonia, polio and tuberculosis from past generations have all but been banished from our generation. Illnesses, including cholera and typhoid, ran a very swift course and death generally came within ten days. However, as knowledge of medicine and technology entered an unprecedented age, illnesses could be prevented, treated and cured. Vaccines practically eradicated childhood diseases like measles and

[33] Clark 66.
[34] More, *Utopia* 60.

chickenpox, and life expectancy moved from 50 to 70. Today, most Europeans do not die swiftly because medical advancements the likes of kidney dialysis, bypass surgeries and organ transplants, have stepped in to delay death itself. We survive infections that once killed quickly, only to live long enough for the body to wear out slowly. [35]

In *Brave New World*, the flaws of disease and old age have been done away with, and the lifelong nagging concerns of how and where our old age will be spent is meaningless. Conditioning has made it unnecessary, because once their organism reaches approximately 60 years of use, they 'retire' to the Park Lane Hospital for the Dying – a cheerful sixty-storey tower of primrose tiles. And, after a brief *soma* holiday, their bodies get whisked away by "gaily-coloured aerial hearses"[36] to the Slough Crematorium where they are permitted to provide their final act of endearment to society.

4.5. "Each Man Must Make His Own Decision"[37]

In truth, is there not always a degree of conditioning exerted by society upon an individual? Are values and ideals not imposed upon the individual? On Utopia, the elders are respected for their knowledge and wisdom. It would then naturally follow that any sage counsel to end a life that was considered emptied of pleasure (not fully definable as life in its real sense) would not be that readily challenged. Granted that the individual is given a choice, but just how much is it

[35] Now our major killers are degenerative diseases, cancer, strokes, Alzheimer's, AIDS and so forth. We have been protected, if not isolated, from the dying, and death is only marginally discussed. In the late 1960s, Dame Cicely Saunders revived the hospice tradition in the United Kingdom out of a need to provide terminally ill patients with end-of-life services. It was the first modern hospice facility for the terminally ill. Throughout the 1970s, the hospice movement gathered some momentum and "put forward a gentler understanding of death … accepting it with new humanism, as an integral, dignified part of our life process and bringing the dying back into our homes … the dignity and support of home and family." Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association <www.chpa.net/about_us/history.htm>. "Hospice" is derived from the Latin word "hospitium" which means hospitality or hospitable. "Palliative" is derived from the Latin "palliare" which means to cloak.
[36] Huxley, *World* 180.
[37] Clark, 38.

truly free? Does upbringing have any influence on an individual's decision-making process? [38]

An instance in which upbringing may have had a part in this semi-conditioning of values and behaviour lies in the indifference and scorn that Utopians have towards gold and silver, as well as other precious goods: "These and the like attitudes the utopians have picked up partly from their upbringing, since the institutions of their society are completely opposed to such folly."[39] A further particularity is that children do not stay permanently with their parents, which could eventually account for differences in values and behaviour, but rather they are all raised communally. It avoids contamination of thought (and sounding very much like the New World state), it avoids contamination of excessive emotional ties. Utopian religious philosophy for life is that no pleasure should be sought if it brings pain. Consequently, Utopian rationality would then lead an individual suffering excruciating pain to reason that: if life's pleasures are interrupted by pain, then he must move himself to the following level – death.

In *Brave New World*, Huxley's ideal society has the resourcefulness of advanced biological and psychological engineering to rectify the work of nature and upgrade the species. Thus, the moulding of character in this dystopian society takes on different contours to that of the Utopians': "a remorseless creation of the various psychological types desired by those in control … education is thought to pass over into "conditioning" and thereby become something altogether different."[40] Certainly, it will be inculcated from the moment of artificial conception. There is no question of 'free will' or 'choice', because conditioning is congenital, inbred, and so it remains till the day they slip smilingly into a beautiful and permanent *soma*-filled sleep. Non-writers of utopian fiction frequently express similar fears that psychological and scientific knowledge of the most

[38] In more ways than one, we are brought up believing in and accepting things as they are. I am, of course, referring to simple everyday things, which are not challenged because we believe them to be good for our own sake or for the greater good of society. It is human nature to take things for granted until we are 'taught' to change acquired habits.
[39] More, *Utopia* 49.
[40] George Kateb, *Utopia and Its Enemies*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1972) 142.

polished and sophisticated sort could fall into the hands of evil and power-starved men, thereby gravely threatening an individual's dignity and freedom to think rationally and independently.

While Ken's intellectual capacity may be his only hope of securing his desire to be released from the hospital, ironically it also threatens to keep him imprisoned. His greatest fear is that he will lose the tiny spark he has left of humanity, and once that has gone he will be nothing more than a limp and useless body, subject to a lifetime of mental anguish and chronic depression. Despite the availability of advanced technology, he does not believe it will be mentally stimulating or spiritually fulfilling. In discussing this very possibility, he shows how adamantly he is in his convictions:

> DR SCOTT. But if you become happy?
> KEN. But I don't want to become happy by becoming the computer section of a complex machine. And morally, you must accept my decision.[41]

Ken's physicians did absolutely everything within their reach to save him and they succeeded, for he is alive, but at a price – his autonomy. He is utterly dependent on others. Certainly it would be natural to feel some impotence at seeing someone like this and not be able to do anything more, at least nothing more that matters. In Act I, Dr Emerson has recommended that Ken's dose of tranquilliser be upped from two to five milligrams, because he finds Ken far too restless and inquisitive about his condition. Granted that today tranquillisers are administered to alleviate pain and suffering but they also serve a dual purpose of 'dulling' the senses of both the patient and those who look on, physicians and family, and, in certain circumstances, such measures are considered to be in the patient's 'best interests'. When Dr Scott decides to give Ken the tranquilliser herself, Ken explains:

[41] Clark 35.

> KEN. I'm paralysed and you're impotent. This disturbs you … you find it hard to accept you're impotent. The only thing you can do is to stop me thinking about it – that is – disturbing you. So I get the tablet and you get the tranquillity."[42]

In other words, he gets a dose of artificial happiness while time elapses, and the impotent physicians are "free of guilt."[43] The guilt that is being referred to here is the sense of helplessness that medical professionals may feel. Indeed, Ken is alive, but despite all the advances of science, they cannot restore his body to its original state.

Unlike Dr Emerson, Dr Scott is unable to maintain her professional distance and remain emotionally detached. She is well aware of Ken's capacity to deliver his arguments in an assertive and intelligent manner, which only helps to impress on her the integrity and rationality of his decisions. Stressing that as he still retains full control over his consciousness, he argues that he must be awarded full rights over the conclusions it arrives at. Dr Scott displays doubts as whether or not to give Ken the dose of tranquilliser and opts to speak to her superior in the hospital hierarchy. Dr Emerson's first reaction comes across as condescending puzzlement that a quadriplegic can actually deter a physician from administering a drug. Perhaps, his manner can be ascribed to the extremely professional attitude (somewhat proud and arrogant) he has, that a physician is in a position to overrule any opinion or decision of the patient, contrary to the elders on Utopia who consider the individual's views. The ensuing dialogue between the two physicians reveals Dr Emerson's frustration that Ken has managed to infiltrate the hospital's wall of professionalism and challenge his medical authority:

> DR EMERSON. But in spite of two qualified opinions, you accept the decision of someone completely unqualified to take it.

[42] Clark 14.
[43] Clark 62.

> DR SCOTT. He may be unqualified, but he is the one affected.
> DR EMERSON. Ours was an objective, his a subjective decision.[44]

Despite Ken's consciousness, Dr Emerson believes that they have not been absolved of their responsibility as medical professionals, and must strive to maximise whatever powers he retains. However, Dr Scott counteracts him by replying: "And how does a depressant drug improve his consciousness?"[45] Possibly, Clark intends this line as a challenge and not as a defence, because she starts her question with 'and'. Were it a defence, he would have had her start with 'but'. Soon after their conversation, Dr Emerson heads off to Ken's room alone to administer the tranquilliser himself, and it is the attitude that he adopts which comes across as somewhat calculated and perhaps even sinister. Not allowing Dr Scott to go in with him might even be understandable because there is already a clear threat of emotional involvement, but he also refuses Sister to go in. The scene is brief and intense, culminating in the aggressive and cruel exposition of Ken's helplessness. Dr Emerson is firmly set as the villain of the story.

Throughout the play Ken claims the right to his full (drug-free) consciousness and the decisions it may come to, which ultimately means that he has the right to possess control over his own treatment, his own will. Tranquillisers dull his senses and numb his consciousness, and it would be a deliberate act of cruelty to keep such an individual, who is mentally astute, sedated against his will. This is highlighted further throughout the play by the jarring contrast made between Ken's debilitated physical condition and his fully operational mental state. Indeed, his sharp wit and fabulous sense of humour prevent the play from becoming overwrought with inflated sentimentality. In *Brave New World*, however, Ken would be just another citizen of the New World state, intellectually oblivious of his very existence. And, it is precisely this kind of

[44] Clark 19.
[45] Clark 20.

morbid existence that he fears, that given time and plentiful doses of tranquillisers he will end up an empty container, and who will listen to him then?

Eudaimonia, in its true sense, has not been found in Huxley's *Brave New World* where they all dress the same, think the same and feel the same. They are but slaves, bizarrely happy slaves. I say bizarre because 'happiness' is not what one would normally imagine for a slave, though I tend to see the citizens of the New World Sate as unconscious slaves. Bernard has a moment of enlightening revelation on one particular occasion, which he foolishly decides to share with Lenina. On their way back across the Channel, the weather is changing quickly, but, though is it is becoming rapidly cloudy and windy; he decides to hover the helicopter within a hundred feet of the crashing waves. It is his moment with nature, but her feelings are the antithesis to his:

> '… I don't want to look.'
> 'But I do,' he insisted. It makes me feel as though …' he hesitated, searching for words with which to express himself, 'as though I were more *me*, if you see what I mean. More on my own, not so completely a part of something else. Not just a cell in the social body. Doesn't it make you feel like that, Lenina?'
> But Lenina was crying. 'It's horrible, it's horrible,' she kept repeating. 'And how can you talk like that about not wanting to be a part of the social body? After all, everyone works for everyone else. We can't do without anyone. Even Epsilons …'[46]

It is an opportunity for Bernard to question his existence, as he is already having 'unnatural' and unorthodox feelings for Lenina. However, bearing his innermost secrets to her is a futile endeavour, because she is too far conditioned to begin even to grasp what he is trying to relay to her. The conversation that ensues is revealing:

[46] Huxley, *World* 81. This search for utopian ideals in the solitude and beauty of nature is a notion I have already addressed, though fleetingly, on page 116.

> ‘Yes, I know,’ said Bernard derisively. ‘”Even Epsilons are useful”! So am I. And I damned well wish I weren’t!’
>
> Lenina was shocked by his blasphemy. ‘Bernard!’ she protested in a voice of amazed distress. ‘How can you?’
>
> In a different key, ‘How can I?’ he repeated meditatively. ‘No, the real problem is. How is it that I can’t, or rather – because, after all, I know quite well why I can’t – what would it be like if I could, if I were free – not enslaved by my conditioning.’
>
> ‘But Bernard, you’re saying the most awful things.’
>
> ‘Don’t you wish you were free, Lenina?’
>
> ‘I don’t know what you mean. I am free. Free to have the most wonderful time. Everybody’s happy nowadays.’
>
> He laughed. ‘Yes, “Everybody’s happy nowadays.” We begin giving the children that at five. But wouldn’t you like to be free in some other way, Lenina? In your own way, for example; not in everybody else’s way.’[47]

One of the remarks in this exchange that is ironically unexpected is that Bernard, like other Alphas, seems only aware of the chains of conditioning that enslave him. It will prove to be a superficial awareness. Nonetheless, while Lenina argues in favour of her collective freedom, Bernard wants the opportunity to experience individual freedom. Essentially, he wants to experience all the other sentiments that human beings normally experience; fear, danger, pain, love, and so forth. Seneca says that even a slave is free. If the suffering, humiliation and imprisonment are taken away, our mind, our capacity to think *is* the ultimate power. Yet, I wonder. Are we truly ever free? We have already been conditioned in some form or another, subtly, but conditioned.

On the island of Utopia, individual intellectual pursuit is recommended and held in high esteem. Within the boundaries of the state, which also seeks stability, they are allowed to question new ideals and concepts, as may be determined by Hythloday’s arrival and the subsequent introduction of Christian

[47] Huxley, *World* 81-82.

doctrines. Ultimately, conditioned or not, the choice is offered to a terminally ill man if he is of sound mind. He has a choice. There are no hallucinogenic drugs like *soma*.[48] But, they are brought up thinking that the greater collective good is supreme. For instance, Utopians acknowledge that not all individuals feel a natural inclination for intellectual pursuits and some would rather devote their time to their trades: "[those] who don't care for the intellectual life, this is not discouraged; in fact, such persons are commended as especially useful to the commonwealth."[49] However, in all fairness, Hythloday reports that: "even those who once worked but can do so no longer are cared for just as well as if they were still productive."[50]

Perhaps More allowed for the Utopians to practise euthanasia to draw attention to the rigorous organisation of that society, and how the individual must work for the benefit of society as a whole as opposed to the single individual. There are two elements that ought to be considered in saying this. Firstly, that society does the humane thing to end an individual's life or allows him to 'part' guilt-free, if that individual is no longer fulfilling his full physical or intellectual potential. Hence, the decision is made upon the advice of priests and not men of law, contrary to Ken's outcome. Secondly, the individual's will is respected. He is not pressured into doing anything, but rather he is given a choice. More importantly, he is given a choice free from guilt, this is no catch 22 situation, because here, if he wishes to end his life, he does so comforted in the thought that all is well with his community and his God. Should he choose not to end his life purposefully then he is equally comforted in the thought that he shall be cared for without rancour or hard feelings on the part of his community and that morally he

[48] According to the BMA, when a person is suffering terribly, the brain releases chemicals, which are hallucinogenic in nature, and which may bring about irregular behaviour such as the desire to anticipate death. It is an argument that pro-life activists are clinging to more and more. According to them, in such circumstances, it is not possible to determine whether a patient is speaking lucidly or not and that euthanasia is in fact their wish. Frequently, this condition is designated as 'depression', and it is the one fact, which underpins the argument of Ken's physicians.
[49] More, *Utopia* 37.
[50] More, *Utopia* 82

has made the right choice. There are no added pressures of possessions or undue responsibilities to family because the whole community shares in all those responsibilities; he is not bound by any of it.

It is also important to recall that one of the Utopians' greatest rules is that in order to avoid any irrational or rushed decisions and in order for a motion to be deliberate and well-though out, then such an issue is never debated on the same day. This is relevant for the decision upon euthanasia; it must be well-thought out, not entered into lightly. The nature of the Utopians' religious principles are: "that the soul of a man is immortal, and by God's goodness it is born for happiness,"[51] then if excruciating pain stands as a barrier to that happiness if follows logically that that mortal life in that body which serves as a mere container, may be discarded.

4.6. The Curtain Falls.

The English have always had a strong tradition in theatre. Even More, whose image usually comes across as overly severe and extremely pious, is known to have dabbled in the world of theatre with great enthusiasm in his youth. Traditionally, it has been a meeting place. Once the play is over, people will usually linger behind a while longer, and for whatever reason, the truth of the matter is that the sound that fills the entire theatre building, from stage to foyer, is thrilling. For, the sound is the sound of theatre. People instinctively turn to each other to put their thoughts and impressions into words. It would be an excellent opportunity for playwrights, actors and directors, amongst other theatre personnel, to listen in, because the first words are pure reaction to the play's message. In portraying the very matted debate of euthanasia in such a thought provoking and unsentimental manner, Clark has challenged timeless concepts of ethics and taboos on death. His skilful use of humour, witty characters and effective

[51] More, *Utopia* 50.

language management build up towards the dramatic final climax, holding the audience's attention. Trials are by nature nerve-wracking, particularly when the decision is not wholly desirable either way. Part of us wants Ken to lose, and yet there is another part that is equally hopeful that he will not. Regardless on which side of the euthanasia debate we stand, the truth of the matter is that his integrity is worthy of respect and his courage is enviable. His own mother says: "Do you think life's so precious to me, I'm frightened of dying?"[52] *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* is not a play over the right to die, but rather it is over the right to choose. In 'Mar Adentro' Ramon Sampedro says that: "life is a right, it is not an obligation."[53] His words sum up the crux of *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*.

[52] Clark 50.
[53] Mar Adentro, dir. Alejandro Amenábar, perf. Javier Bardem, Belén Rueda, and Lola Dueñas, Fine Line Features, 2004.

V

CONCLUSION

One of man's greatest acclaimed desires must surely be to live a long and happy life, with the added bonus of doing so in a youthful and healthy body. Wishful images of fighting back illness and hunger have contributed to building such ideals, thus: "[even] fairytales of an ideal state, in which there are no longer any other deprivations, cannot avoid considering disease and the role of the doctor."[1]

More's *Utopia* has not done away with illness or old age, but it has made death pretty much effortless. Unlike his England, which is barely out of the Middle Ages, Utopia enjoys the privilege of spacious, comfortable and clean hospitals. Utopian understanding of medical procedures is sufficient to ensure that its citizens are knowledgeable in such practical matters as cleanliness, good diet and exercise. Furthermore, they are also well-aware of the importance of balancing intellectual and spiritual pursuits with pleasures of the body, for only in doing so can a man really be virtuous and happy.

Also lying in the realm of fantasy is Huxley's *Brave New World*, a bleaker antithesis to *Utopia*, but it also addresses those much acclaimed desires of man. For, in this brave new world, unhappiness has found a cure in *soma*, disease has all but been stamped out and old age has been amazingly pushed back by stubborn youth. The New World state has espoused a policy of advanced genetic manipulation, which includes the most sophisticated scientific techniques such as eugenics, hypnopaedia and drug inducement, to guarantee happiness and stability. Indeed, happiness is the very marrow in this society's backbone. So much so, that the prospect of death is embraced with the willing rendition of its own citizens' bodies, happy in the knowledge that they will continue to be useful to society long

[1] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959) 457.

after they have been vaporised into phosphorous. Ultimately, "the social body persists although the component cells may change."[2]

Whose Life Is It Anyway? does not indulge in any fantasy about an unattainable Garden of Eden. Rather, it is another blow towards knocking down the remaining walls of taboo that have withstood change. The human desire for a lengthy, happy and healthy life must indeed stretch out from the very first day of creation, when man caught his second reflection in the water and did not like the change, or, perhaps when he felt his first unpleasant twinge foreboding oncoming illness. Indeed, it is the fear of pain and dying that has mostly driven man to seek alternatives to his miserable lot, and in the process of his search, he has actually half-stumbled upon half-toiled towards advancements in science and technology. And, behold: antibiotics that can defeat invisible enemies that flow in our bloodstream; machines that can breathe in our stead; foetuses still in gestation that survive out of the womb. The euthanasia debate and the possibility of its legalisation has gained ground in recent years, partly because of the new technologies for artificially prolonging life (or arguably prolonging death) and also because of the discovery of new drugs, such as various anaesthetics for the relief of pain, that could also painlessly cause death.

Indeed, the rapidity and range of modern scientific development has been awesome and deserves that we take our hats off and applaud such progress. Yet, this progress comes with small print attached to the bottom of life's contract, and by the time we actually begin to scrutinise what is written in the most miniscule of letters does it dawn upon us that so much technology has been encroaching into our very existence all the while. There is so much of it that we find ourselves unable to do without and so ironically the addiction worsens, and the doses of "*soma*" increase.[3] Sometimes, just sometimes, from behind our "*soma*-blurred

[2] Huxley, *World* 87.
[3] Unlike Huxley's brave new world, our happiness supplement has other names for *soma*. Designer drugs are found in most bathroom cabinets nowadays, like for instance, psychic anaesthetising Prozac is a common household name, much like Colgate.

eyeballs", we catch a glimpse of famished wolf-like technology dressed in sheep's clothing.

But, progress is not innately bad. It has taken us out of the gloomy medieval infirmaries in More's England into Clark's England where some of the finest hospitals in the world stand to this day. Yet, we can also observe how Huxley's brave new world has already crept into them somewhat stealthily. That is chilling. For, in that brave new world there is only progress: scientific, technological and mechanical, but not emotional or spiritual. What afflicts the fictional character John the Savage in *Brave New World* is that this new civilisation has no room for nobility or integrity. It is Ken's final request that society grant him the dignity he is due, and, despite the cul-de-sac up ahead, it is the path he chooses to take. Life ought to be addressed as ought to death. Certainly, death ought to be seen as a part of life. Some may regard it as the closing of a cycle, while others may regard it as the start of a new one. Whatever the outlook, society must decide once and for all where it stands. Whether simply "[to] abolish the slings and arrows"[4] or whether to have the integrity to ask: Whose life is it anyway?

In More's *Utopia*, the Utopians defend and practise voluntary euthanasia. The terms under which caring for the ill on Utopia function are described in sardonic terms. Professional carers look after patients with devoted care and do everything within their reach to cure ills and make patients feel as comfortable as possible, thinking: "it [is] cruel that a person should be abandoned when most in need of comfort; and … old age, since it not only entails disease but is actually a disease itself, needs more."[5] However, when a patient has an intolerable and excruciatingly painful illness, the patient has the option to die, either through starvation or some deadly poison. There is no further need for repetition of Hythloday's words, because they have already been mentioned often enough. Nevertheless, I would like to add this, that besides the technique and the

[4] Huxley, *World* 218.
[5] More, *Utopia* 61

terminology, little has changed. The heart of the argument is the question of at what point is euthanasia a voluntary act and at what point is it influenced by a socio-political ideology or other external interests?

In Western societies, firmly established prohibitions on assisted suicide have in recent years been re-assessed and, overall, reaffirmed. The main focus of attention at present lies in how best to secure dignity and independence at the end of life. Consequently, there have been restricted alterations in the law and in the attitudes that these laws manifest. Many Western societies have opened legal doors to 'living wills' surrogate healthcare decision-making and the withdrawal or refusal of life-sustaining medical treatment. In his play, Clark has brought this hefty discussion out into public. According to Lamb: "It is, after all, the infinity of death which gives significance to the value of life principle and the fears of a wrongful death add credence to slippery slope warnings against any departure from this principle."[6]

To say that More's *Utopia* is a 'realistic' utopia sounds at the very least paradoxical. After all, is his island of Utopia not simply a flight of fantasy? An imaginary island in the middle of nowhere? However, according to Eliav-Feldon, it is exactly that:

> [*Utopia* is not] dependent on any supernatural conditions or any divine intervention which would change the cosmos, human nature, or the course of history … [it] remained well within the scientific and technological possibilities of the age … [it] grappled seriously with the major and the minor problems of … society, offering practical, feasible solutions in minutest details.[7]

Indeed, it certainly seems that in writing *Utopia*, More's true intention was not to submit radical proposals for social change, but rather he hoped to lessen the everyday heavy burden that his countrymen had to bear due to the dismal of social

[6] Lamb 48.
[7] Eliav-Feldon 129.

conditions. So, although *Utopia* was a figment of imagination, More had his feet firmly set on English soil when he wrote it. Eliav-Feldon puts it most aptly in stating that such a utopia was built "on virgin soil free of all debris."[8] More brought back the utopian genre to English literature and it seems to have served as a gentle breeze throughout the ages, pollinating other fields of intellectualism and thereby allowing others to enjoy the fruits of so much literary labour. Overall, scholars do not regard *Utopia* as being any gloomy foreboding of things that were yet to come. As far as euthanasia is concerned, evidence seems to point in a direction contrary to that of pro-choice campaigners today. More's approval of euthanasia was as real as Huxley's approval of *soma* to control the masses, or Clark's approval of the physician to have the last say in a patient's treatment. What all three have done is to present such notions in a masterly way so as to allow the reader to reach his own conclusions.

Whilst on the one hand, the dispute whether morality is essentially subjective or not is as ancient as moral philosophy itself and as passionate as the euthanasia debate (though admittedly the latter is more in the limelight at present), on the other hand, science is overall regarded as being objective. Perhaps, this can in part explain much of the indecision that has hovered, pretty much relentlessly, over the euthanasia debate. Science and medical advancement have been trespassing at a rather rapid pace into the moral sphere and this has quite naturally given rise to new dilemmas, particularly that of which ought to be placed first or attributed greater importance in society's set of values in a world which is evolving just as rapidly. However, within the world of science there has always been much discord throughout the ages, for even those whose names are greatly acclaimed – Bacon, Newton, Darwin, Einstein, among others – did not always have it easy and did not always see eye-to-eye.

Many explanations have been offered as to why so many people disagree over the ethical question of euthanasia. One of the explanations that has been put

[8] Eliav-Feldon 129.

forward is that it lies in the belief that morality is not like science, which is concerned with facts, but rather it is a question of values, about which we can only have personal opinions. Science is objective while morality is essentially subjective. If science is objective because it has the capacity for demonstration and proof, then it also ought to follow that the ethical 'argument' is a matter of rhetoric. In other words, if I wish another person to believe that what I believe is the truth, then it becomes more a matter of exerting *persuasion* rather than having to prove anything. According to Graham, most people believe that: "just as there are scientific laws, there are moral laws that lay down right and wrong quite independently of the likings or dislikings of human beings."[9] He goes on to point out that this is, however, a disentangled version of a very elaborate and knotted web.

The element of persuasion takes on many varied guises, but the one this study is addressing and which might be regarded as one of the most powerful is that of the written word. Indeed, an accomplished writer uses his skills of rhetoric as a vehicle to share his convictions and hopes, and in the process to influence the opinions of others, or eventually even sway more stubborn minds. A true master of rhetoric is able to question those more thorny issues with such deftness that he gathers opposing parties at the same dinner table.

There is surely no shortage of literature on euthanasia at present. In fact, there is such a broad spectrum of presence from bedside table reading to scientific debate in conference rooms, to the more philosophically inspired outlook of the ancients. The question of the legalisation of euthanasia is as feisty and debatable as ever. Certainly, it has entered a new phase, changed its 'visual' – fashion trends tend to sway in society and so do they in intellectual circles. The era of the global village has certainly had its fair share in winning over followers to one side or another, swallowing public opinion into a vortex of ideals and arguments (the heartstrings certainly feel the tug no matter how impartial or objective we might

[9] Graham 2.

wish to remain, or believe ourselves to be). The arguments are equally strong and convincing; and what it comes down to, I believe, is quite simply that life is our cut of the social kaleidoscopic cloth and we have a set time in which to cut and stitch accordingly. As creatures of habit, we tend to look around and see what others have already done or are doing at that moment. Sometimes we want to break free from the going tendency, others prefer that conservative 'look', but it is just that that makes it so worthwhile.

The year 2005 was hardly under way and the euthanasia debate was raging more than ever. Michael Schiavo, a desperate loving husband to some, fortune seeker to others, finally saw the United States Supreme Court rule in his favour. All forms of life support were to be removed from his wife who had been lying for 10 years in a vegetative state. Despite pleas from pro-life organisations and interventions of religious factors, all forms of life support, including food and drink, were removed, and Terri Schiavo's final chapter was completed two weeks later. Television networks broadcast live debates with such distinguished and varied speakers from religious leaders, to medical specialists, to professors of philosophy, in an earnest attempt to bring some clarity and order to such hubbub. However, the media, as we know it to be, has perhaps other motives, for time is not wasted in showing just how flagrantly sensationalist it can be. Cameras, wires and microphones are set up invading the homes and hospitals of people with severe disabilities, physical or mental, or the terminally ill, and in about 60 minutes give or take a few more (for publicity of course) the age old issue of euthanasia continues to prevail. These words and images invade our homes, our minds and our hearts. Indeed, that is the very effect that such networks are hankering after. No matter what we do, or do not do, we cannot refrain from becoming caught up in the complex web of ethics, even if it is via impersonal moving images in a metal box. Ethics involves values – what we consider to be good and bad, right and wrong.

The world of literature has not been hibernating, rather, it has been diligently accompanying all the most recent moral tendencies. It is delightfully

curious that the names of More, Huxley and Clark are often quoted by advocates, opponents or simply neutral commentators of euthanasia. Indelibly, their literary works have been leaving marks on generations of people and, in all likelihood, will continue to do so for generations yet to be born. Singer persists in thinking that: "the puzzle of ethics is starting to come together, and that few, if any, pieces are missing."[10]

In bringing this study to a close, at least on paper, for many of the issues that have been addressed throughout will continue to be as ardently disputed as ever before (if not more), I would like to emphasise the Singers' words:

> Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill have, over a period of two and a half millennia, set out their views on these questions. Long before the rise of systematic philosophical thought, however, people have been making up stories in order to convey what they think about how we ought to live. Inevitably, in telling stories, and in writing novels, plays, short stories and poems, the authors and narrators raise moral questions and suggest possible ways of answering them. Thus ethics comes squarely within the field of literature, as well as within the field of philosophy. Each approach to ethics has its own strengths and weaknesses.[11]

Unarguably, the understanding of *eudaimonia* from the philosopher's perspective spins a far more intricate web than the layman can ever hope to; but, put in simpler words, is this not what most people inevitably want out of life – happiness and what we have to do in order to obtain it? We just seek it in different ways and places. Yet, tragically and ironically more often than not, we stray from the path, mostly because of the choices that are made. It is said that man spends half of his life wasting his health to gain money and he spends the other half of his life wasting his money to gain health. I am more convinced than ever that what More, Huxley and Clark hoped to do, through the power of their words, was to

[10] Singer, *Companion to Ethics* 545.
[11] Singer *et. al.*, preface, *Moral of the Story* x.

stimulate others to find answers to what was really of value in life, and yet I suspect they might have done it to seek answers themselves.

The purpose of this study has been to define the position of euthanasia in English literature by studying the relevant attitudes surrounding the euthanasia debate within the context of cultural, philosophical, historical, legal and religious backgrounds. By tugging – to develop the analogy this exposition began with – at particular threads of the kaleidoscopic fabric of the human condition, I have hope to show that, irrespective of geographical or cultural distance, values and practices filter down through the ages and allow for cultural exchange, assimilation and moulding. So, although the suicide and euthanasia debates are basically cut from the same cloth and may share common tailors, the technique and stitching is different. More, Huxley and Clark fashioned this cloth to their liking, and true to the art of creators dazzled, shocked and set trends. Each of these writers, who had started out as an apprentice, would eventually become the master of his own creation. The debate of ideologies and practicalities, which began in the mists of time, rages on, at least for the present. Our distant ancestors chose different paths to tread upon and their many contributions recorded in literature have enabled generations upon generations to travel that much farther. It is the written word in its labyrinth-like nature that has allowed us to contemplate different approaches to this most sticky debate that is euthanasia. Ultimately, it is the individual that has to tell his tale and make his choices whilst he stands at the crossroads of life. Perhaps, one day, he will be able to look back and say with a sigh:

> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
> I took the one less travelled by,
> And that has made all the difference.[12]

[12] Frost 96.

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