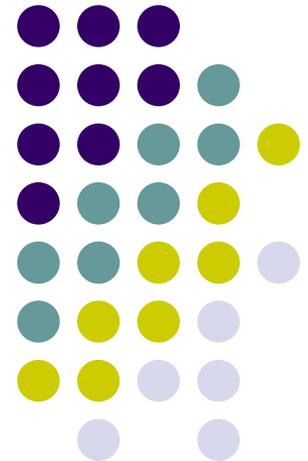
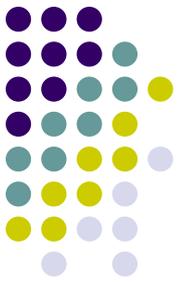


Defending Human Dignity: Catholic teaching about euthanasia, abortion & prenatal testing

Fr Kevin McGovern,
Caroline Chisholm Centre for Health Ethics:
Penola Catholic College,
4 April 2014



Choices about society's ethical debates



1. Silence



2. Reasoned argument

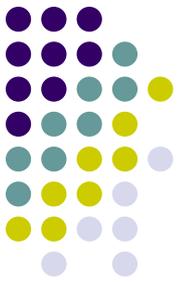
- Accepts that some will disagree
- There may be a price to pay



3. 'Aggro'

- High moral outrage
- Often attacks opponents personally

The ethics “war”

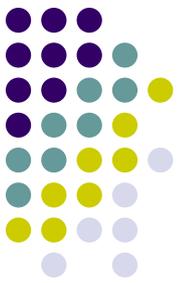


- **Traditional Morality**

- Based on Greco-Roman philosophy and Judaeo-Christian revelation
- Ongoing ethical tradition at the heart of Western civilisation
- Continues in Catholic teaching (and other religious traditions)

- **The ‘New’ Morality**

- From the Enlightenment (C17 – C18)



The ethics “war” (cont’d)

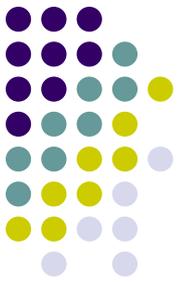
- **Traditional Morality**

- Based on agreement about what it is to be human
- Emphasis on the **Common Good** of society
- Human beings find fulfilment through service

- **The ‘New’ Morality**

- NO agreement about what it is to be human
- Emphasis on autonomy and free choice
- Human beings find fulfilment through **freedom**/free choice

The ethics “war” (cont’d)



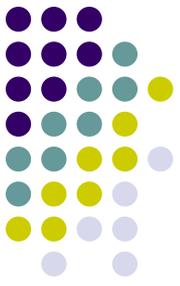
- **Traditional Morality**

- the common good
- solidarity
- community
- service

- **The ‘New’ Morality**

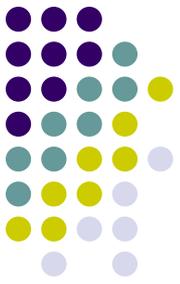
- autonomy
- freedom of choice
- independence
- consumption
- materialism
- consumerism
- I believe this is a pseudo-morality or an anti-morality

Traditional Morality



- Human beings have a natural instinct and inhibition against killing each other. We know that it is wrong – except in very specific situations - to kill other human beings.
- The exceptions to this general rule against killing are situations such as self-defence, war, ectopic pregnancy, and perhaps capital punishment.
- In each case, the exception is justified by the saving of another human life.
- Euthanasia and abortion do not belong to this series of exceptions to the law against killing.

Euthanasia, Abortion and Prenatal Testing



- What the Church says
- Views in the community
- Ways to present this issue
- What your experience has taught you

EUTHANASIA:

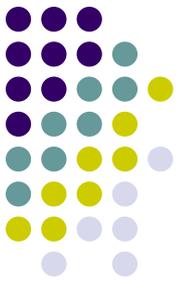
What the Church says



- It is wrong to kill yourself. It is wrong to help another person to kill themselves.
- The time before the end can often be extremely significant both for the dying person and their loved ones. The best is yet to come, and we all have a lot of living left to do.

EUTHANASIA:

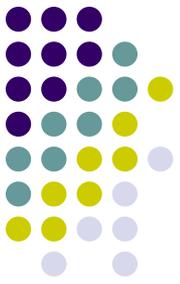
What the Church says (cont'd)



- Try not to fear growing dependency. While we try to be independent, throughout our lives we are always dependent on other people. Try to see the growing dependency of old age or terminal illness as a reminder of our ultimate dependency on a loving God.
- Dignity is intrinsic to the human person. I don't lose my dignity just because you have to wipe my bottom!

EUTHANASIA:

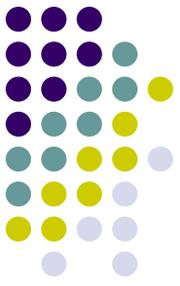
What the Church says (cont'd)



- All of us should try in whatever ways we can to support those with terminal illnesses and their families. People particularly need our support at these challenging times.
- Living well and dying well are one of the greatest legacies which we leave.

EUTHANASIA:

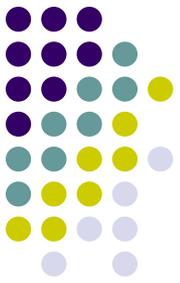
Views in the community



- “If a hopelessly ill patient, experiencing unrelievable suffering, with absolutely no chance of recovering, asks for a lethal dose, should a doctor be allowed to give a lethal dose or not?”
 - In polls, a significant majority say yes.
 - However, this *broad* support does not seem to be very *deep*. Very few people are passionate advocates for euthanasia. Many change their minds as they think more about this issue.

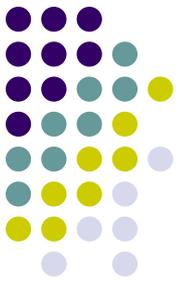
EUTHANASIA:

Ways to present this issue



- **Types of ethical argument:**
 - Deontological
= this is right or wrong in itself
 - Consequentialist
= this is right or wrong because it has good or harmful consequences

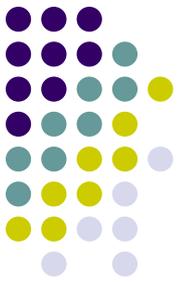
Deontological Arguments



- See the slide headed Traditional Morality
- Expose euphemisms:
 - Nembutal “the peaceful pill” is poison.
 - What is at issue in the euthanasia debate is not “allowing to die.” It is *killing* – either killing oneself or killing another person.

Consequentialist Arguments:

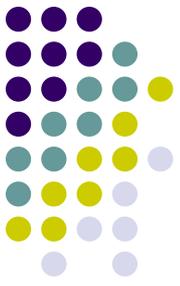
The “safeguards” are illusions



- **“Safeguard”**
 - Repeated requests for euthanasia
 - Less than 6 months to live
 - Not depressed
- **Problem**
 - WTHD often disappears when the problem is identified and remedied
 - Very often it is impossible to tell how long a person has.
 - Psychiatrists often cannot diagnose depression in a few appointments.

Consequentialist Arguments:

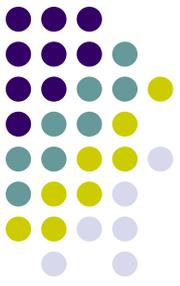
The logic of choice



- Even if euthanasia is introduced for a carefully circumscribed group, the logic of choice means that this group will gradually expand. If it's all about choice, why shouldn't everyone who is capable of choice be allowed to choose?
- Over time, euthanasia on demand will become available to everyone over the age of 16.

Consequentialist Arguments:

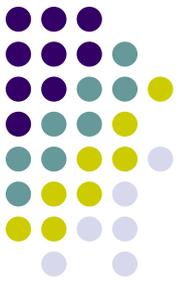
“You’d be better off dead”



- Many euthanasia advocates call for doctors to be the gatekeepers who decide if euthanasia is appropriate for individuals (i.e. who would be better off dead)
- Once someone is given this authority, there is a danger of its expanding to include either those who cannot decide for themselves (such as children or those with disabilities) or even those whose decision to live is not supported by the authorities.

Consequentialist Arguments:

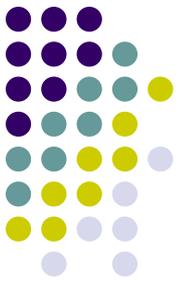
More sinister concerns



- Some unscrupulous families may pressure a relative to choose euthanasia either to spare themselves from being part of a lengthy process of dying - or to get the inheritance sooner.
- Palliative care costs many thousands of dollars. The drugs for euthanasia cost about \$300. With rising medical costs, might we come to criticise those who choose the more expensive option? Might the so-called 'right' to die become a duty to die?

ABORTION:

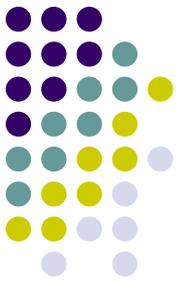
What the Church says



- Unless the mother's life is at imminent risk, it is wrong to kill an unborn child.
- Many women suffer psychological harm as a result of abortion.
- Especially when a woman faces an unplanned pregnancy, we should make every effort to offer her emotional and material support.

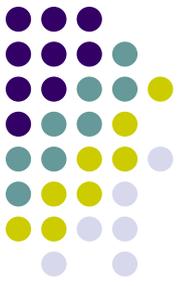
ABORTION:

What the Church says (cont'd)



- This support helps a woman to make genuine choices. Too many women opt for abortion because they feel that they have no alternative.
- There is hope and healing for women who have been hurt by abortion. The Church commits itself to helping women who have been hurt by abortion.

ABORTION: Views in the community

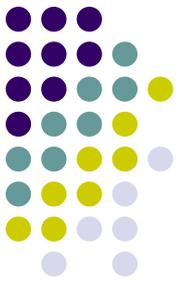


Common Ground? (2007), edited by John Fleming and Nicholas Tonti-Filippini:

- 62-69% would not restrict women's access to abortion
- 61-65% think that the number of abortions in Australia is too high
- only 15% think that abortion is morally right if it involves a healthy fetus and no abnormal health risks to the mother
- Australians are ambivalent about abortion. They offer "support *in principle* for a woman's right to choose, but a preference on moral grounds that women *in practice* either do not choose abortion, or only choose abortion after consideration of all the alternatives." (p. 71)

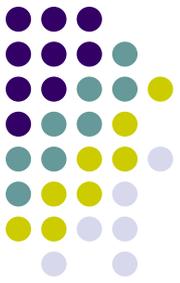
ABORTION:

Ways to present this issue (cont'd)



- Be pro-woman:
 - A woman who is facing an unplanned pregnancy is experiencing a great crisis. Focussing only on her unborn child may cause her to feel that she is not being heard and cared for. As a result, she may feel even more isolated, more alone and more desperate.

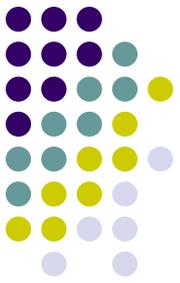
Decision-making counselling



= not telling her what to do, but offering support so she can make an unpressured decision:

- Suggest that she take time to get over the initial shock.
- Ask her to try to get in touch with her own values:
 - A year ago, before this crisis began, what would her ethical views have been about the various choices which she now faces?
 - Two years from now, what might her views be about the various choices which she is now facing?
- If she is a person of faith, ask her to pray about her situation and the choices which she must make.

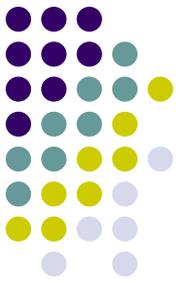
Be honest about the psychological risks



Women & Abortion: An Evidence Based Review (2005), by Selena Ewing:

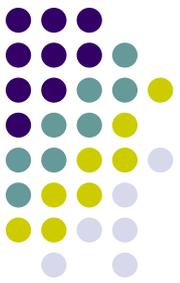
- based on all 168 articles in the peer-reviewed journals in the previous 15 years:
 - “Ten to twenty percent of women suffer from severe psychological complications after abortion.
 - Many more women experience emotional distress immediately after the abortion and in the months following, including sadness, loneliness, shame, guilt, grief, doubt and regret.
 - Depression and anxiety are experienced by substantial numbers of women after abortion.”

Be honest about the psychological risks (cont'd)



Women & Abortion: An Evidence Based Review (2005), by Selena Ewing:

- “For a small proportion of women, abortion triggers Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- After abortion women have an increased risk of psychiatric problems including bipolar disorder, neurotic depression, depressive psychosis and schizophrenia.
- Women who have experienced abortion also have an increased risk of substance abuse and self-harm.” (p. 2)



Don't dismiss adoption (cont'd)

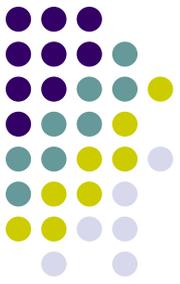
- I do not mean the old, forced and closed adoption. I mean the new adoption which is freely chosen and open.
- Many dismiss adoption out of hand. Their choice is then either keeping the child or abortion.
- Really, there should be a 2-step process of decision-making:
 - Am I able to keep this child? (If this is possible, this is always the best choice.)
 - If I am not able to keep this child, abortion or adoption?
- See my "Adoption is Better than Abortion," *CHEB* 16:1, pp 4-9 at http://www.mercy.com.au/About_Us/Research/Bulletins/



Useful Contacts

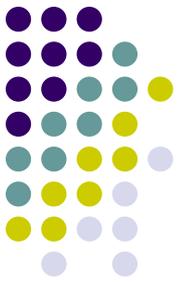
- The **Caroline Chisholm Society** offers non-directive counselling over the phone to help women who face an unexpected pregnancy: (03) 9361 7000 or 1800 134 863 for country callers.
- **Open Doors** also offers non-directive counselling: (03) 9870 7044 or 1800 647 995.
- **Catholic Care** offers non-directive face-to-face counselling, which can be arranged by calling (03) 9689 3888.
- **Rachel's Vineyard** offers weekend retreats for healing after abortion: <http://www.rachelsvineyard.org.au/>

PRENATAL TESTING: Views in the community



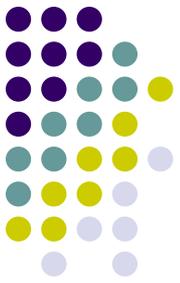
- Prenatal screening (e.g. ultrasound scan, maternal serum screening)
- Prenatal testing (e.g. chorionic villus sampling, amniocentesis)
- Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT) – still expensive and uncommon
 - About 75% of children with Down syndrome are detected before birth. More than 90% of them are terminated.
 - Of the children with life-limiting conditions which are detected before birth, again more than 90% are terminated.

PRENATAL TESTING: What the Church says

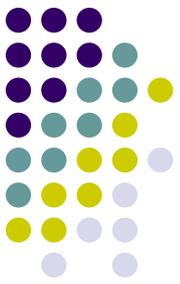


- Even if a child will die soon after birth, it is still wrong to kill them before their time. It is also wrong to kill unborn children with non-life-limiting disabilities.
- The life of a person with disability is a life of value. Their difference enriches the world in so many ways.
- To continue the pregnancy of a child with a life-limiting condition is to give that child the gift of time. Many families have found this to be one of the most meaningful experiences of their lives.
- Support for families who continue the pregnancy of a child with a life-limiting condition is called perinatal palliative care.

Down Syndrome

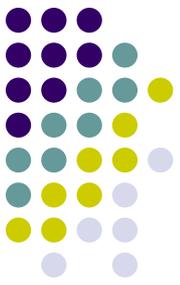


- Get the facts: Brian Skoto et al (2011):
 - From interviews of more than 2,000 parents from 6 US states: Almost all loved their child. Because of their child, they had learnt more patience and flexibility, and were more kind and empathetic. Laughter and joy were important parts of their family life. Only 4% regretted having a child with Down syndrome.
 - Siblings of a child with Down syndrome displayed more empathy and kindness than similar children. Less than 5% would swap for a sibling who did not have Down syndrome. They did not see their sibling as a burden, and saw their experience as positive.



Down Syndrome (DS) (cont'd)

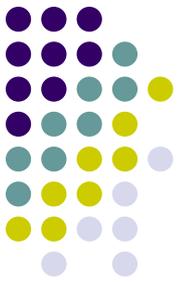
- 284 people with Down syndrome said they were happy with their lives. They encouraged parents to love their child with Down syndrome because their child with Down syndrome would love them.
- For Skoto's research and more, see Kerri Anne Brussen's "People with Down Syndrome: Part of Our Community," *CHEB* 18:2, pp 1-5 at http://www.mercy.com.au/About_Us/Research/Bulletins/
- Contact Down Syndrome Victoria on 1300 658 873



Perinatal Palliative Care

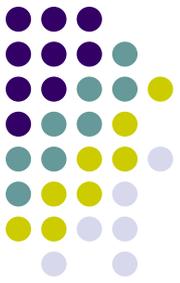
- Amy Kuebelbeck and Deborah Davis's *A Gift of Time: Continuing Your Pregnancy When Your Baby's Life Is Expected to Be Brief* (2011)
- My "Continuing the Pregnancy When the Unborn Child has a Life-Limiting Condition," *CHEB* 17:3, pp 5-16 at [http://www.mercy.com.au/About_Us/ Research/Bulletins/](http://www.mercy.com.au/About_Us/Research/Bulletins/)
- The Australian Perinatal Palliative Care website: <http://www.pnpc.org.au/>
 - Chelsea: "I learned... that there was a possibility that our baby would live up to an hour after birth. I decided that even five minutes with my baby alive in my arms would be worth it."
 - Annette H: "I really have peace that we carried her to term. I know in my heart that I have given my daughter all that I could and loved her every day of her life."

Perinatal Palliative Care (cont'd)



- Jamie: “My whole family wanted me to terminate... In the end everyone was so glad that I decided to continue. We all fell in love with her.”
- Camille: “If we had decided to terminate this pregnancy I would still have dealt with pain, suffering, loss, and regret. By carrying Brayden until natural death I was able to love him longer, give him everything I could, and there is zero regret. You cannot avoid the pain, suffering and loss either way.”
- Annette G: “My soul has grown and matured. Nathaniel’s life has taken me in new directions and given me a larger, more patient and understanding heart. I am more focussed on relationships as the most important thing in life. I feel I live more purposefully and deliberately than I did before.”
- These five quotes are from *A Gift of Time*, pp 30, 343, 367, 343, & 369

A Concluding Thought from a Famous Ethicist



- Albus Dumbledore
- in the 2005 movie *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*:
- “We must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy.”