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Letters to the Editor

Catholic Physicians' Guild

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Letters to the Editor

To the Editor,

Regarding the article on, "Definition and Criteria of Clinical Death", (November, 1973, Rizzo and Yonder) I would comment as follows:

I am unwilling to concede that "human" means anything less than the fullness that its definition implies. To indicate that to be "human" is more neocortex than vegetative, or, perhaps more self-consciousness than feeling, or more soul than body, etc., is to stumble into the very error that plagues us in the philosophical approach to the problem of abortion. To be "human" is to be all and probably a great deal more of the aforementioned albeit in varying degrees and at varying times in the course of a human life span. Is the badly retarded child who has neither, "the capacity" nor, "the potential" for "higher mental function" for "reflective consciousness", to become a living bank for spare organs because he lacks that potential?

The thinking reflected in this article is somewhat analagous to what is becoming increasingly fashionable in papers published by the Hasting Institute and in other ethical literature. Here, for some unspecified reason, there is a distinction between being "human" and being "fully human" or, "totally human". Is a being that is human ever less than *fully* or *totally* human? Obviously not. To be human implies a totality, a unicity that neither is made more human by adding an adjective nor less so by omitting it.

I would argue strenuously with friends Rizzo and Yonder against accepting as a criterion for a so-called "upgrading" of clinical criteria for death, "the need" of one human as over against the needs of the potential donor. Laudable and pragmatic as the ends intended may be, they do not justify less than scrupulously applied means.

The primordial principle holding the absolute value of any one human's life, regardless of its current condition must be

maintained as a totally unnegotiable point, not only in this instance but in the abortion issue and in all other related medical-ethical situations.

The second reason for "upgrading" the criteria, viz, the "family's hardship" is not a valid objective reason to tamper with the Harvard criteria.

In summary, the only safeguard for fully protecting an individual under any set of circumstances and at any time is to demand the most stringent set of criteria possible for the protection of a human life. There is no value short of heaven that transcends this goal, absolute.

Sincerely,

Vitale H. Paganelli, M.D.
66 Park Street
Glens Falls, New York

To the Editor,

I have with me a copy of your August Issue of Linacre Quarterly. I read it with great interest. Would you be kind enough to send me the other issues so that I can bind them up and keep in our library? I shall highly appreciate if you could enroll me as a subscriber of this magazine.

We have over a thousand member hospitals in our Association as members. A journal of the philosophy and Ethics of Medical Practice will be of great help to me in giving guidance and direction to our members. Please do the needful for which I shall be immensely grateful.

Yours sincerely,

Fr. Emmanuel A. Pallikunnen, V.C.
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