

# FAITH MATTERS

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## BEWARE DOCTOR-ASSISTED SUICIDE

BY BILL DONOHUE



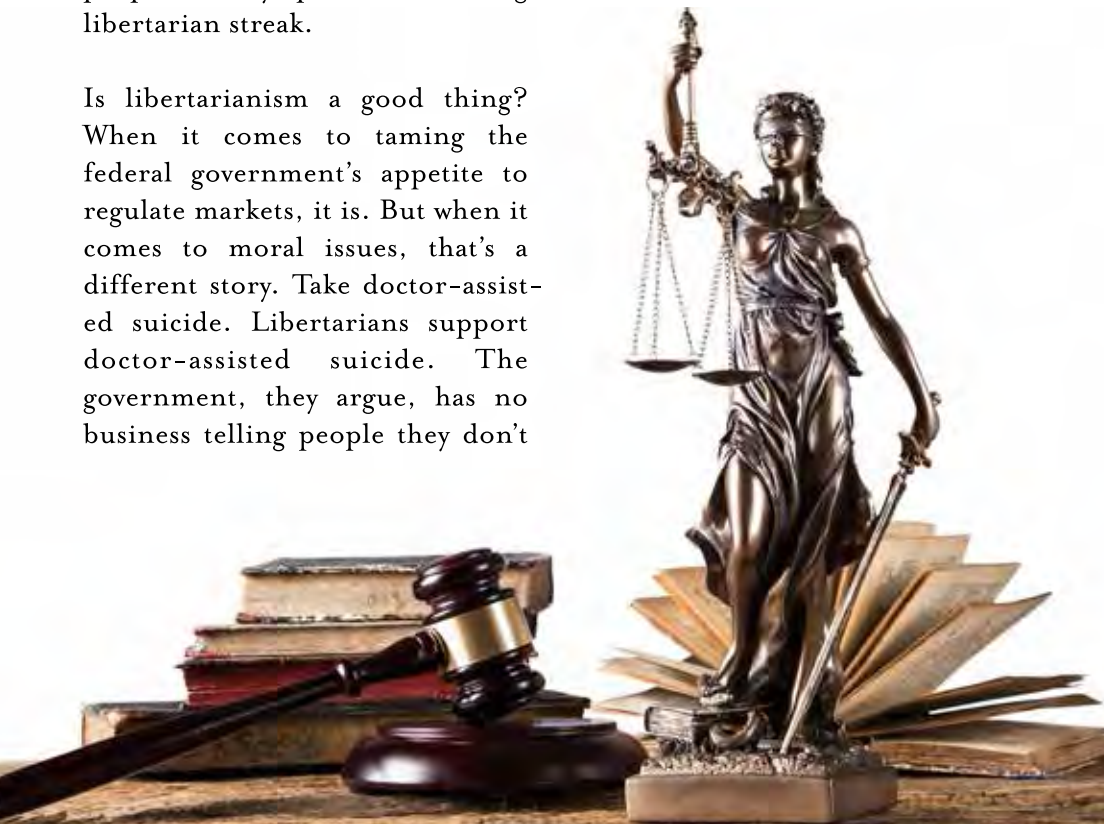
If there was one strain of political thought that was evident in the November elections [2014], it was libertarianism. As a political philosophy, libertarianism today is roughly what was called liberalism in the 19th century; it is also known as classical liberalism.

Essentially, it maintains that the good society is best served by having a minimal role for government. Liberalism today, of course, favors a big role for government. In the mid-term elections, libertarianism manifested itself as a revulsion against ObamaCare, and other intrusions by the federal government into our lives. The public has become increasingly wary of government busybodies, and this is especially true of young people: Many possess a strong libertarian streak.

Is libertarianism a good thing? When it comes to taming the federal government's appetite to regulate markets, it is. But when it comes to moral issues, that's a different story. Take doctor-assisted suicide. Libertarians support doctor-assisted suicide. The government, they argue, has no business telling people they don't

have the right to terminate their own lives. Sounds seductively attractive at first glance: Whose rights are interfered with if someone elects to kill himself? It's a consensual act, so why should there be any laws against it?

Let's examine these propositions. Bribery is a consensual act, but we wisely have laws against it. Why? Because the person making the bribe is given an unfair advantage over others; so it really doesn't matter if the person making the bribe — as well as his happy recipient — like the transaction. Society matters. To be sure, society does not have rights — only individuals do, but it surely has interests. Among them are justice and the general welfare of the people, as





outlined in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.

It's true that no one's rights are being interfered with if someone chooses to kill himself. It's also

true that no one's rights are

interfered with if two men choose to

duel to the death in public. Why not

allow them to kill themselves — the

winner must kill his challenger in

order to collect his booty — at Madison

Square Garden and show it on

pay-for-view TV? The coarsening of

our culture that such an exhibition would

yield is not something we should encourage. If

human life is nothing more than a commodity to be

disposed of any way we choose, would we not be going

down a dangerous road? The history of the 20th century, especially in Germany, suggests

we would be.

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people treat each other and themselves matters. Moreover, rights are not an end: They are a

means. They are a means to liberty. The exercise of rights that intentionally result in the death of

a human being is not advancing the

cause of liberty; death eliminates the prospects of liberty interminably.

There is another problem with doctor-assisted

suicide, namely the doctor. Doctors are trained to save lives,

not end them. When we change their mission, we

change who they are. Once they become mere

instruments, their profession is no longer the same. Consider what has

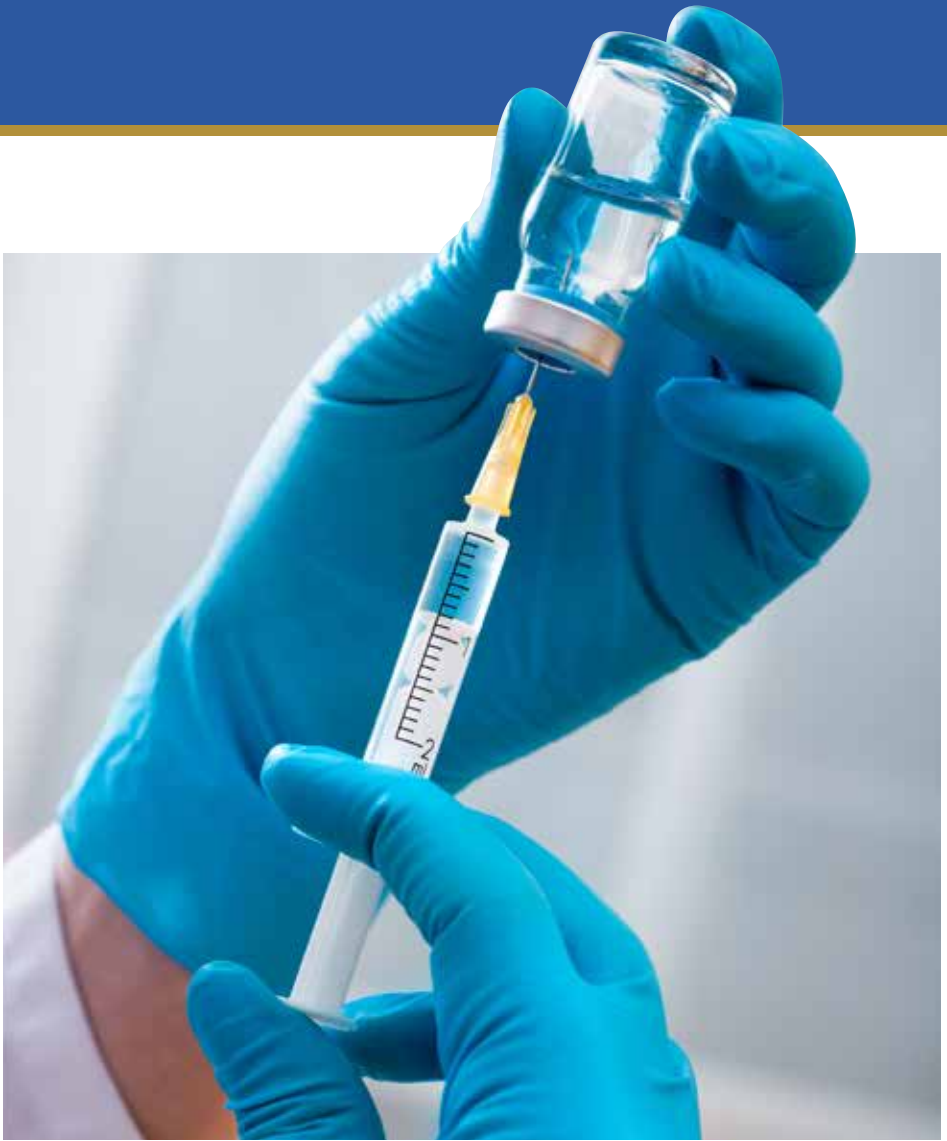
happened in nations where

doctor-assisted suicide is legal.

Euthanasia has a familiar history. It always starts with putting down the terminally ill, and it never

stops there. In this country, at least 70% of those who were killed by Dr. Jack Kevorkian were not

dying, and some weren't even ill. So-called mercy killing is not a slippery slope — it's a sheet of ice.



It's a myth that some of the sick are suffering so badly that nothing can be done to stop it. Quite frankly, because of advances in medicine those days are over. The picture of the screaming patient writhing in pain is more than a canard — it's a cruel demagogic ploy promoted by those who have a vested ideological or financial interest in the budding euthanasia industry.

The merchants of death are not fixated on the elderly; they are quite egalitarian in their pursuits. For example, the cause

of infanticide is seriously argued by Nobel Prize winners and Ivy League professors: Parents, they maintain, should have the right to kill their infants. Then there are those who may be physically healthy, but are nonetheless hopelessly depressed. They also make fine candidates for an early death.

If we are truly interested in achieving the good society, we need to ask ourselves how the adoption of policies that accelerate the death of innocent human beings facilitates that end.



## BILL DONOHUE

BILL DONOHUE, Ph.D., is the President and CEO of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. The publisher of the Catholic League journal, *Catalyst*, he served for two decades on the board of directors of the National Association of Scholars.

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