

## **Disordered faculties: Joseph Raz on euthanasia versus on the amoralist**

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*Abstract.* I argue that Joseph Raz's paper on euthanasia faces a problem of coherence with Joseph Raz's paper addressing the question of "Why should I be moral?"

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Joseph Raz has written on a variety of topics, such as euthanasia, the authority of law, the relevance of ideals to governments, the problem of why be moral, and the nature of reasons to do things. It is tempting to locate these in a certain way, so that some topics are closer to others. There are more practical topics, such as the right to euthanasia, and less practical ones, such as why be moral. Everyday life would be unbearable without some morality (agreement-keeping, dispute-resolution, etc.), so this is just a problem for clever philosophers to discuss in class – at least that is what someone might think. But actually the relationships between the topics he addresses is more complicated than, or just different to, this representation. Below I wish to argue that Raz's material addressing the problem of the amoralist is relevant to his material assessing the right to euthanasia. There is a question of how both can be made coherent.

### **Raz on the amoralist**

Let us start by summarizing Raz on the problem of the amoralist. The amoralist is a stock figure in the philosophical literature. They ask, why should I be moral? The problem seems pressing for anyone addressing moral topics, but is it? Raz

understands the problem as depending on two propositions:

- (i) The problem would be solved if one can give a person without morality a compelling reason to be moral.
- (ii) If one cannot give them such a reason, then being moral is not rationally defensible (1999: 273).

In Raz's eyes, if one of these propositions is false, then we can reject the problem rather than troubling ourselves with trying to solve it.

Raz sets aside an amoralist who has no rewarding relationships with friends or family and does not care for any. He says that their life is severely limited, so they are not relevant for his discussion of the problem (1999: 283). But he argues that we have no reason to think that any amoralist fares better with accessing valuable goods in life. As I shall interpret him here, Raz argues that we can reject the problem of the amoralist because proposition (ii) is false. He argues against this proposition by appealing to the following premises: if any life without morality would be severely limited, then the rational defensibility of morality does not depend on giving a person without morality a compelling reason to be moral; and any life without morality would be severely limited.

In making this argument, Raz has to draw a distinction between two kinds of human life: a life which is severely limited and a life which is not severely limited. The concept of a severely limited life is under-explored in Raz's paper but it is relevant for the topic of euthanasia. I turn next to some of Raz's points about euthanasia.

### **Raz on unremitting great pain**

According to Raz, advocates of euthanasia often identify conditions in which euthanasia is appropriate, because in those conditions one's life is not worth living. One of the conditions is a life of unremitting great pain.

Raz disagrees with the view that such a life is not worth living. He imagines a person living a life of unremitting great pain who chooses to die and he cannot see what mistake they are making. But he also imagines a person living a life of unremitting great pain who chooses to live and he cannot see what mistake they are making. To reconcile his two conclusions, which together entail that neither is making a mistake, he proposes that a life of unremitting great pain in which a person chooses to live is worth living, whereas a life of unremitting great pain in which a person chooses to die is not worth living (2013: 6). The choice makes the difference. With the choice to live, such a life is worth living, contrary to the advocates of euthanasia Raz is responding to.

### **Coherence issues**

The "standard" advocates of euthanasia include such a life as part of a list of lives not worth living, says Raz, and in relation to which euthanasia is appropriate (2013: 6). Below is the list:

- (a) A life without consciousness, known as a vegetative life.
- (b) A life of unremitting great pain.
- (c) A life of total dependence on others.
- (d) A life of greatly diminished mental capacities (severe loss of memory, absence of linguistic capacity, etc.).

Now Raz's philosophical opponents might appeal to the distinction between two kinds

of life that Raz himself appeals to in his paper “The Amoralist” as underpinning this list: they are all severely limited lives as opposed to rewarding ones. If a life is severely limited, then it is not worth living and euthanasia is appropriate, and it should be covered by the list. But that would give them a reason to regard the person who chooses to live with unremitting great pain as making a mistake: they fail to realize that their life is a subtype of this more general type of life, which is not worth living.

How can Raz respond to this defence of the list? An option for him is to say that the choice to live with the pain somehow takes it out of the category of the severely limited. But then he is going to have to reconcile the following two commitments:

*(Choice thesis)* A life of unremitting great pain is not severely limited when it is chosen.

*(Amoralist methodology)* An amoralist who cares not for friends and family would have a severely limited life and so we can set them aside.

If a life of unremitting great pain which is chosen is somehow not severely limited, then how can one say that the amoralist’s life is severely limited? The worry here is partly or wholly because the amoralist’s quality of life does not seem obviously worse. Various people might prefer it. Is there another option available to Raz, which avoids problems of coherence? I am not sure. But note that the conclusion of this paper is not just that Raz faces a problem of coherence, rather that topics which do not appear to neighbour each other are in relationships which “your map” does not detect.

## References

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