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Daniel Callahan First in Series of Speakers

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DAYTON, Ohio, October 23, 1974 --- "Good death like good grief is ultimately a contradiction in terms," said Daniel Callahan, Wednesday, October 16 at the University of Dayton.

He was quoting Dr. Paul Ramsey, author of "Fabricated Man: The Ethics of Genetic Control," who will be the third speaker in the free public lecture series sponsored at UD by the Ohio Program in the Humanities and the UD Philosophy Department.

Callahan, Director of the Hastings Center, Institute of Society, Ethics and Life Sciences, was the first in the series of speakers who will appear on campus throughout the year. Among the questions to which they will be addressing themselves are the "right to die," fetal experimentation and genetic engineering.

"As a movement, death with dignity has had a band wagon effect with the liabilities of emotionalism and a lack of precision," Callahan said, adding, "there are a cluster of claims in the process of dying that include a number of related rights."

Among those rights, according to Callahan, is that each may choose the manner of his death. There are neither legal or religious roadblocks to passive euthanasia, according to Callahan. Passive euthanasia means the cessation of unusual medical treatment thus bringing about death. Rather, the resistance is a cultural one and one built within the medical establishment which has as its mission to hold death at bay.

The present laws making positive euthanasia difficult should remain in force, believes Callahan. "If an individual is in intolerable pain, he has the moral right to request death. And the attending physician has the moral right to honor the request. But, it would not be a duty. It cannot be a positive obligation. I'm not promoting positive euthanasia. I want it to be very hard," he said.

Callahan did promote the education of hospital personnel in the needs of the dying. "Too often, when one is finally dying and there is nothing medicine can do about it, there is psychological and spiritual abandonment on the part of hospital personnel. Death reminds us of our own mortality and hospital personnel are not immune," he said.

Callahan said in summary, "Death is a reality. We should address ourselves to how one ought to go about living, contemplate death, and if the choice is given us, have the courage to make the choice."

As the series continues through the colloquium November 8-9, Dr. Kenneth McDougal will discuss "Genetic Engineering - Proposals for Gene Manipulation", October 23, and Dr. Paul Ramsey will address the subject of Fetal Experimentation on October 31.