The Nature of Wisdom & the Challenge of Euthanasia:  
A Critique of the “Argument from Nature”

Professor Marvin Kohl

Professor Kohl studied philosophy and sociology at the City College of New York and New York University. His research interests are in social and political philosophy, ethical theory, and matters of life and death.

Professor Kohl is the author of The Morality of Killing and the editor of Beneficent Euthanasia and Infanticide and the Value of Life. He is also the author of numerous articles and reviews, including articles on “Life and Death” and “Euthanasia” for the Encyclopedia of Ethics. He has had a life-time interest in the writings of Bertrand Russell and currently serves as Chairperson of the board of directors of the Bertrand Russell Society.

Prof. Kohl writes about his topic:
There is a certain attitude about wisdom with which we should have some sympathy. It is the claim that man should not try to overcome or master nature but has to learn how to adapt to it. In the West, the great protagonist of this view was Rousseau. In the East, we find it set forth more persuasively in the Buddhist notion that no philosophy of life is really humane unless it recognizes the inevitability of human suffering, defeat, death, and destruction — and provides some anodyne through wisely cultivated resignation.

The questions of fundamental concern are: To what extent should we follow “nature”? Does wisdom only command that we accept what must be and live fully in the present? Or does it further require that we accept everything as it is, including preventable misfortune and suffering? And do other “arguments from nature” make a convincing case against voluntary euthanasia?