

Critics of this view argue that we risk going down a slippery slope whenever we fail to value life itself. After a society declares it acceptable for elderly patients to choose death over continued suffering, the right to die can easily turn into a *duty* to die. Persons with a potentially terminal illness would naturally ponder the question of whether their continued life would be a financial burden for their loved ones.

Privacy: How absolute is the right to be left alone? The U.S. Supreme Court has, in *Roe v. Wade*, used the right of privacy as the basis for declaring that women should have a right to legal abortion early in a pregnancy. Do people have a right to surf the Internet without any government intrusion? Do people have a right to protect their homes and automobiles from being searched by government agents? If we have these rights, how is society to be protected from evils such as child pornography, illicit drug distribution, and terrorist activity?

Self-Actualization: In the hierarchy of human needs proposed by psychologist Abraham Maslow, the highest human need is “self-actualization.” By *self-actualization*, Maslow referred to a commitment to achieving one’s own mission in life and accepting that mission as an end in itself. Accordingly, a musician is fulfilled by making great music, an artist is fulfilled by making a great sculpture, and a poet is fulfilled by writing poetry. Each person achieves intrinsic worth by striving to realize his potential.

Critics of self-actualization argue that satisfying the self is not the highest value in a good society. The focus on self can produce a form of narcissism that undermines the family and the common good.

CRITERIA (STANDARDS) FOR COMPARING VALUES

Utilitarianism: The principle of utilitarianism (also called *pragmatism*) is commonly explained as valuing “the greatest good for the greatest number.” Utilitarianism originated with the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham and his student John Stuart Mill. Bentham, in his 1789 work *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, argues that an action is right if it promotes happiness and is wrong if it promotes the reverse of happiness. This system of ethics has often been characterized as allowing the ends to justify the means. An action that might at first appear evil could end up being good if it produces widespread happiness.

Joseph Fletcher, a professor of Christian ethics at Harvard Divinity School, added a modern twist to utilitarianism. In his 1963 book *Situation Ethics*, Fletcher argues that one must examine the nature of a particular situation before declaring which actions would be right or wrong. Fletcher, however, replaced Bentham’s criterion of happiness