

2.3 Unnecessary and undesirable treatments and interventions

2.3.1 Changes to the body by pharmacological or surgical interventions

Any such intervention has to be judged by the therapeutic principle or the principle of totality and by the criterion that no violence will be done to human dignity. This means that at any intervention one should consider if the person is not going to be instrumentalised by it and degraded by a purpose that is not in accordance with human nature.

2.3.2 Cosmetic surgery

Interventions of plastic surgery meant to cure defects or deformities that are congenital or were caused by disease or trauma are considered salutary and therefore permissible. However, the Church objects against interventions that:

1. are merely directed at embellishment or an arbitrary change in the shape of the body (e.g. breast implants to enlarge the breasts, silicon injections etc.);
2. aim at the enhancement or augmentation of natural physical or mental abilities (e.g. leg extension in athletes, brain implants to enhance memory);
3. are aimed at changing the existing external sex characteristics into those of the opposite sex (sex change operations in gender dysphoria);
4. offer an improper solution to the underlying problem (e.g. stomach surgery for obesity).

2.3.3 Impermissible pharmacological interventions

The uncontrolled, non-therapeutic use of the following substances is not permitted:

1. Substances that hamper the normal function of the human consciousness (psychedelic/hallucinogenic substances);
2. Substances carrying a great risk for mental and/or physical dependence;
3. Substances that are designed to enhance the physical performance capacity to abnormal height (anabolic steroids and other forms of doping, cocaine);
4. Substances that stimulate mental performance capacity to abnormal levels (amphetamine and the like).

Apart from the above there are many pharmacologic substances that are being used as a medicine for mental disturbances (depression, anxiety) but are also, uncontrolled and in greater quantities, used to alter or improve one's mental disposition. There are also substances that carry no risk when used in moderate quantities (e.g. alcohol), but that could lead to dependence and addiction. These are permissible when used with moderation.

2.3.4 The general criterion that one should apply in the judgment on the



permissibility of the interventions and pharmacological substances in the questions above

Man should live his life in a natural manner, i.e. according to his nature. This means that any form of enhancement, augmentation of the physical or mental level of performance above the normal one, should be banned. There is no objection to the augmentation of the present level of performance in useful abilities by a reasonable use of instruction and training.

2.3.5 Electronic implants in the brain

When these are used with a therapeutic purpose, such as the treatment of Parkinson's disease, obsessive-compulsive behavior, severe anxiety, unexplained untreatable pain or where implants are used to replace a sensory function that was lost (e.g. cochlear implant, artificial retina) there is no moral objection. In all those cases one should keep in mind the therapeutic principle.