

Principles and views on euthanasia philosophy essay



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Euthanasia, as defined in the dictionary, is “ the practice of killing a human being or animal for humane reasons, especially one suffering greatly or experiencing poor quality of life” (“ Euthanasia - Definition”). There are two types of euthanasia known as passive and active. “ Passive euthanasia is defined as: allowing a patient to die by withholding treatment, while active euthanasia is defined as taking measures that directly cause a patients’ death” (Gorman, D. (1999). This paper will show euthanasia from many different ethical standpoints or views. Views core has discussed, such as Kantian, utilitarian, and virtue ethics that will be applied. This will also discuss the current legality of Euthanasia and its present use.

Kantian principles would apply for you if you have the mindset that, if the motivation was of good intent, than the consequence doesn’t matter. To get a better insight into what Kant thinks, here is a paragraph from his book. “ If a man cannot preserve his life except by dishonoring his humanity, he ought rather to sacrifice it; it is true that he endangers his animal life, but he can feel that, so long as he lived, he lived honorably . . . If, then I cannot preserve my life except by disgraceful conduct, virtue relieves me of this duty because a higher duty here comes into play and commands me to sacrifice my life” (Fatemi, S. (2007).

By this, he means that, if you are suffering that bad that your quality of life has dropped to the point where you can’t stand to live anymore, then you may want to be killed. He says dishonoring humanity this is by ending your life but as long as the person lived an honorable life, then it should be fine if he dies because they has served the human purpose of living. The human purpose is to be honest and live your live towards your duties and complete

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them. So the dishonesty of dying equals out the honesty of living a good life. So virtue saves the dying person from the duty of living because of the suffering that they are enduring.

An example of Kantian ethics would be, if you were a doctor and you have a patient that was suffering unbearably. You had to pump massive amounts of morphine into him just to ease the pain of living. Each day he would ask you to just kill him and one day he described to you how great his life has been up to this point. So you think to yourself, well he's had a good life and his suffering is so bad that why not kill him. My motivation for killing him is good it would relieve him from his suffering. So the next day you give him an extra amount of morphine and he slowly passes away. If it was me I would feel relieved for him and not feel guilty.

“ The preservation of one's life, therefore, is not the highest duty, and men must often give up their lives merely to secure that they shall have lived honorably. There are

many instances of this; and although lawyers may argue that to preserve life is the highest duty and that in case of necessity a man is bound to stand up for his life, yet this is no matter of jurisprudence” (Fatemi, S. (2007).

Therefore a man that wants to die by the hand of someone else is fine by Kant as long as the person that wants to die has lived honorably.

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism principles would intend for you to think that if it's for the greater good then do it, even if the motivation is not good or ethical. “

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Utilitarian's seeks to maximize good and minimize harm. From this perspective, prolonging death harms patients, going against nurses' responsibility to avoid malfeasance. Patients have the right to ask not to suffer, and nurses have a duty to help. The consequences of assisted suicide, active euthanasia, and passive euthanasia death and an end to suffering are the same" (Sullivan, M. (1999).

An example of utilitarianism is, say your grandmother has a disease that is very contagious and she is in quarantine. The family members don't want her to die. The doctor talks to her and she says that she is suffering and wants to die. The only way to stop the spread of this extremely contagious disease is for her to die. So the doctor took it in to his own hands to kill her. Should he be punished for what he did, he took one life to save hundreds. It was for the greater good of humanity therefore utilitarian. There are many historical examples of this such as the work done by Dr. Murad " Jack" Kevorkian in my opinion he saved thousands in medical expenses for all his patients.

" There is, of course, no single ' utilitarian perspective', for there are several versions of utilitarianism and they differ on some aspects of euthanasia. Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism. According to act-utilitarianism, the right action is the one that, of all the actions open to the agent, has consequences that are better than, or at least no worse than, any other action open to the agent. So the act-utilitarian judges the ethics of each act independently. According to rule-utilitarianism, the right action is the one that is in accordance with the rule that, if generally followed, would have

consequences that are better than, or at least no worse than, any other rule that might be generally followed in the relevant situation" (Singer, P. (2003).

Virtue Ethics

The definition of virtue is " a means between two extremes, an excess and a defect, with respect to a particular action or emotion" (" Aristotle's Virtues").

According to Aristotle there where ten virtues Courage, Temperance, Generosity, Pride, Good temper, Truthfulness, Wittiness, Friendliness, Modesty, and Righteous indignation. You must find a healthy balance between these virtues in order to live right according to them. Here are the quick definitions for the ten virtues.

Courage is a means between the extremes of cowardice and foolhardiness with respect to the emotion of fear

Temperance is a means between the extremes of self-indulgence and insensibility with respect to the desire for pleasures of the body (eating, drinking, sex).

Generosity (or liberality) is a means between the extremes of extravagance and stinginess with respect to the giving away and taking in of money. [an extravagant person is excessive in giving away , but defective in taking in money; a stingy person is defective in giving away money, but excessive in taking in it].

Pride is a means between the extremes of vanity and excessive humility with respect to ones desire to receive great honors.

Good temper is a means between the extremes of irascibility (or irritability) and apathy with respect to one's proneness to anger.

Truthfulness is a means between the extremes of boastfulness and self-deprecation with respect to the way one presents oneself to others.

Wittiness is a means between the buffoonery and boorishness with respect to one's desires to amuse others.

Friendliness is a means between obsequiousness (e. g., being overly deferential/groveling) and unpleasantness with respect to the desire to please others.

Modesty is a means between the extremes of bashfulness and shamelessness with respect to one's susceptibility to shame.

Righteous indignation is a means between envy and spite with respect to the pleasure and pain that one feels at the fortunes of one's neighbors [e. g., One who is righteously indignant is pained by the undeserved good/bad fortune of others, but is pleased by the deserved good/bad fortune of others; the envious person is pained good fortune of others, whether deserved or not; the spiteful person feels pleasure at the bad fortune of others, whether they deserve it or not]

All virtue definitions taken from http://www.molloy.edu/sophia/aristotle/ne2_notes.htm

To apply virtue ethics to euthanasia you would go through each virtue and see how it applies to the person that wants to die. You can apply courage by

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that amount fear the patient has for dying, in most cases the patient is suffering so much that they have no fear of dying. I believe that is when they have enough courage to die. For temperance the patient in order to be ready for death must give up all earthly pleasures. Most the time the patient is suffering to the point that they become insensible, unable to desire any sort of pleasure. At this point the patient is ready to leave this world. When it comes to generosity I would think in order to assist someone in suicide they must have a written will. They do this to ensure who gets what after the death of the patient. Only after the will is written then someone could assist them in dying.

With pride the patient must have lived an honorable life in order to die. If they have not done so then I believe they don't deserve to die. To live a honorable life you must follow what a life path of good, like following your religion or the good things you done in life exceed the bad karma. Good temper is how the patient feels about their life were they happy or angry about the way they have lived their life. If they are happy with their life but are suffering then they are one step closer to dying. Truthfulness applies to how the patient lived their life through someone else's eyes, did the patient lie a lot to other for personal gains. If so the person was boasting and therefore does not deserve to have someone help them to die. With wittiness patients usually lose their desire to amuse people when they are suffering so much. Therefore if they lose that, they also become depressed and then are ready for euthanasia.

Friendliness is probably the most important virtue because no one is going to help you die if you're mean to them. So if your friendly then people will feel

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bad for you and probably be more likely to help you pass away. Modesty talks about how the patient feels about how he lived his life in the aspect of shame. Does the patient feel any shame from what he's done in life? If so he will have to deal with that shame before they can be helped ethically by another person. Righteous indignation for the patient would be if they feel any spite or envy for others good fortunes. They must be at peace with all people in order to pass away. If the patient is jealous of other people then they must right the wrong in order to be helped.

“ Although most approaches to modern virtue ethics takes inspiration from Plato and

Aristotle, they are not necessarily committed to accepting theses such as the Socratic

Paradox and the Unity of Virtue, or, for that matter, Greek views relating to slavery, women, or ugly people! In addition to this, we could not even contemplate a virtue ethics in health care without non-Aristotelian virtues such as compassion and benevolence. There are also those who, for example, reject the caricature of Kant as the enemy of virtue ethics. There is even the view that virtue ethics is fundamental and that other families of concepts can be reduced to it, and that deontology and utilitarianism are derivative forms of virtue ethics” (2008). Response by Ann M Begley).

As you can see Euthanasia is a very complicated act. There are many reasons to perform the act and there are many not to. The act of taking another person's life can either satisfy a need or destroy a life. The person who is euthanized has had their life come to an end however the person who

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has assisted in the act will have the act on their conscience for the rest of their life. The person assisting has to evaluate the consequences of the act; the rationalization of the need for euthanasia affects not only the need but the psyche of the assistant for the rest of their life. Each situation is unique and the view of the situation and the ethics of the assistant determines their ability to perform such an act.

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