

Life vs death: euthanasia

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The word euthanasia is of Greek origin, which literally translates to mean "happy or good death." However, since the beginning of the 19th century, euthanasia has become associated with speeding up the process of dying or the destruction of so-called useless lives. No longer true to its literal meaning, it is now a practice of deliberately causing or assisting in someone's death. Because it constitutes murder and is immoral, euthanasia should not be legalized in the United States.

Almost everyone who attempts suicide or asks for assistance in their death do so as a subconscious cry for help (What's Wrong With Making Assisting Suicide Legal?). These people want to hear they are loved, not that someone is actually willing to assist in their death (Johansen). Many of these people have emotional and psychological pressures, which can cause them to choose euthanasia as a way to solve problems. Many are either depressed or dependent and are incapable of making well-informed decisions in that state of mind (Euthanasia: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions).

The main concern for those who ask for euthanasia practice should be to give them emotional and spiritual support for their problems (Euthanasia : Answers To ...). This type of counseling and assistance has proven to be successful. A study done on 886 people who had attempted suicide and been helped showed that only 3.84 percent had gone on to kill themselves 5 years later. Another study showed that after 36 years, only 10.9 percent had killed themselves (What's Wrong With...). If euthanasia became legalized, it would be administered for those who are mentally unable to choose what is best, when they could instead be helped.

Many who are in favor of euthanasia may say that a request to be killed is only justified when a doctor thinks a patient does not have a "worthwhile life" (Gormally). However, no one can judge the worth of a person's life. "As a society, we are coming to understand that mere preservation of the flesh is not the highest value". Many times it is the family of a patient who determines whether or not they live a worthwhile life depending on if they can participate in "normal" human relationships (Euthanasia Opposing Viewpoints 103, 117).

Those who support euthanasia strongly believe everyone should have control over their own life and death and many who give "requests for euthanasia may indicate... they are positively asserting their desire to control events" (The Case For...). However, the religious aspects to this issue support a different view. Religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam hold life as sacred and believe it is a gift from God ("Euthanasia" Funk&Wagnalls). If the gift of life is from God, then only God can decide when that life should end, not someone else assisting in a death.

Euthanasia is also considered immoral by these religions because the 10 commandments prohibit murder, which is essentially what euthanasia has become ("Euthanasia" Britannica). When many are suffering from a disease, they would rather die a dignified death than suffer tragically from the disease (The Case For Voluntary Euthanasia). Euthanasia activists claim euthanasia is "death with dignity", even though the methods in which the deaths are carried out are anything but dignified. This can be supported by the euthanasia cases of Dr. Kevorkian, the "Doctor of Death" (Johansen).

Dr. Kevorkian has used carbon monoxide to gas people to death, and has also had bodies dumped in empty vehicles in parking lots (Euthanasia : Answers To...). Another example of how euthanasia killings are not dignified can be shown by the first televised mercy killing, which aired in March 1995 in Great Britain that caused the spark for the euthanasia controversy. The man who allowed cameras to be present at his death was a 63 year old patient of Motor Neurone Disease. Over 13 million people watched as he received a lethal injection by his doctor (Pratt).

When these killings can be displayed for the public to see, they can not be considered dignified, especially by the means in which these deaths occur. If Euthanasia practices become legal, it would only legitimize these degrading practices. " Most elderly don" t fear death as much as they fear the pain and suffering... " that may come along with it (Euthanasia Opposing Viewpoints 136). Because of this, some justify the euthanasia practice as a way to alleviate uncontrollable or intolerable pain that is placed on a patient. Even so, deaths by euthanasia are not always painless.

Even a passive act of euthanasia such as the withdrawal of life support, food and water, can cause a slow and painful death (Euthanasia : Opposing Viewpoints 39). Death is also not the only solution for pain control. In fact, pain control has been perfected in the science fields, so that most pain can be eliminated completely or greatly reduced. Even though doctors are supposed to help control pain, many have never had a course in pain management and don" t know what to do (Euthanasia : Answers To...). Better education should

be provided to healthcare professionals in order to help heal a patient, not harm them, or even kill them.

Though euthanasia is illegal in most countries, where it is widely practiced, such as in the Netherlands, it has sometimes become involuntary on the side of the patient. Euthanasia is held accountable for 15 percent of deaths in the Netherlands, where patients actually fear being checked into hospitals (Johansen). Many times involuntary euthanasia occurs because the patient is incompetent to make decisions. Even though the patient may have written in advance a living will, a will in the United States that allows a person to make decisions on the type of treatments they would want if they were ill, a proxy can override these decisions.

A proxy is usually a relative or friend of the patient that can make decisions for them if they are incapable of communicating on their own. This person could then cause the death of a patient, even if it is a passive act of euthanasia which is not doing something that is necessary to keep a person alive (Pratt). If euthanasia were practiced legally in the United States, it would become involuntary to the patient and possibly cause a larger percentage of deaths than it already does, as it has in the Netherlands where it is commonly practiced.

It is also said that euthanasia would be for those dying from an incurable disease or intolerable suffering ("Euthanasia" Funk&Wagnalls). However, there is no real definition for an incurable or terminal disease, especially since modern medicine has lengthened life spans. Some say a terminal disease is a disease that can cause a death within 6 months, while some who are

claimed to be terminally ill may not die for several years (Euthanasia : Answers To...). In 1976, the New Jersey Supreme Court gave permission to the parents of comatose Karen Ann Quinlan to remove her from the respirator that was keeping her alive.

Even though she was expected to die immediately, she began to breathe on her own and lived another 9 years (Euthanasia : Opposing Viewpoints).

Because of cases such as this that show fault in the definition for terminally ill, euthanasia activists change the term terminally ill to hopelessly ill or desperately ill. The definition used for hopeless condition includes those with physical or psychological pain, physical or mental deterioration, or a quality of life unacceptable to the patient (Euthanasia : Answers To...).

With such broad definitions for the term, hopelessly ill could include mostly everyone. The legalization of euthanasia would entirely contradict the medical practices that were established in the Hippocratic Oath, an oath over 2500 years old. Medical students, upon completion of medical school, must vow : I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgement, but never with a view to injury and wrongdoing. Neither will I administer poison to anybody and when asked to do so, nor will I suggest such a course (Euthanasia Opposing Viewpoints 97).

Even though neither the laws nor medical ethics say everything should be done to keep a person alive, the oath forces medical professionals to make a promise to help the sick (Maier). Doctors should be highly enough educated in order to make the best decision for each individual patient. Even if a person requests assistance in their death, it does not give the doctor enough

reason to say euthanasia would be the best choice for that patient (Gormally).

"Poisons", as stated in the Hippocratic Oath, are not to be administered even though many mercy killings now are committed with "double effect. These are high doses of medicine that may kill a person faster (The Case for...). A high dose of a medicine is as much of a "poison" to a body as carbon monoxide, another means of carrying out the death, is. If euthanasia became accepted in the medical professions, it would be an immoral practice that would contradict its origins. For those who are pro-euthanasia, the laws pertaining to euthanasia are considered to be government mandated suffering.

The other side to this argument is that these laws are not intended to make anyone suffer, but are instead created to prevent abuse and protect patients from bad doctors (Euthanasia : Answers To...). There is no actual provision in the legal systems for euthanasia. It is either considered murder or suicide in the United States ("Euthanasia" Britannica). It can be a tough situation because on one hand doctors who force treatment against wishes can be charged with assault (Pratt), while if nothing is done to prolong life or if life-support is withdrawn, criminal charges can also be brought on ("Euthanasia" Britannica).

In the Netherlands, doctors can assist in a euthanasia death even though it is illegal without the possibility of prosecution and there, euthanasia has become out of hand (Pratt). With the legalization of euthanasia in the U. S. , laws and policies would be changed so that rights that would be given to

others in order to intentionally cause the end of a life (Euthanasia : Answers To...). It would become an uncontrollable practice. Instead of legalization, laws on euthanasia should become stricter. Euthanasia has become a problem in the United States that would only become worse if it were legalized.

Legalization of euthanasia can not be justified when there is no real determination for the definitions of many terms that play a major role in the euthanasia issue. The practice of euthanasia also carries out undignified deaths that are immoral. It has no benefit to the medical society and contradicts all medical ethics. Assisted suicide has also become involuntary, unsuccessful, and uncontrollable in other countries. For these many reasons, euthanasia should not become legal in the United States.