

# Euthanasia



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Euthanasia The purpose of this paper is to provide a critical discussion on the topic of euthanasia. The format that this paper will utilize is to first highlight some main points regarding euthanasia such as legality, definitions, etc. After this point, this paper will provide some background on the topic utilizing five different sources and will cover some of the issues involved in the arguments. This first section focuses on public opinion on euthanasia. There is little question that euthanasia is a complicated issue. For the purpose of this paper euthanasia will refer to any activity that is enacted to enable a more rapid ending of a life that relieves pain and suffering of a patient. From one perspective many people believe vehemently in only one side of the argument or the other. According to an article written by the Telegraph (2010) it is the case that the BBC has been accused of ‘promoting’ euthanasia insofar as the organization highlighted Sir Terry Pratchett’s speech regarding assisted suicide by using dramatic effects and allegedly ignored the rights of disabled individuals. Although these allegations have not resulted in any significant legal action it the article did indicate that at least in the British context a poll indicated that people’s opinions are split evenly on the matter. On the second section of this paper some examples of how this issue can be complicated will be highlighted. For example, Butler (2010) writing for the New York Times indicated that decisions made earlier in the care. The article made reference to the father of the author suffering a serious stroke at the age of 79. After developing a serious and painful heart condition the individual had a pacemaker installed because of a desire of his wife to see her husband relieved of his pain. Fast forward five years the father is bedridden with dementia and is kept alive only with the aide of a pacemaker that is expected to last another five years.

This decision made at a time when the individual was in a relatively healthier state is now practically the only thing keeping him alive in a near vegetative state. From this perspective, special consideration must be made for medical advances that have been made that enable professionals to sustain lives even if one could make the argument that their medical condition is completely terminal. It is upon this foundation that one could for this section will focus on special stakeholders interests in euthanasia. Special consideration must be given for doctors perspectives on the practice of euthanasia insofar as these medical professionals often have to actively assist in euthanasia. According to Ward & Tate (1994) on examination of 273 doctors 163 had been asked by patients to hasten death. Of those asked approximately 32% had complied with these requests which averages approximately 12%. The implications of this study is that perhaps euthanasia was more widespread than once believed and in fact it is important to openly discuss the matter and formalize a strategy to be utilized by different health institutions. Moreover it legalized 142 of 307 respondents indicated that they would consider actively practicing euthanasia if it were completely legal. After this point it is logical to make consideration for the history of Euthanasia. Dowbiggin (2005) highlighted that there have been a number of highly publicized cases of doctors being convicted of assisted suicide. Examples such as Maurice Genereux being convicted in Toronto 1998 are fresh in many peoples memory. Ultimately it was argued that many doctors throughout history have practiced euthanasia yet have chosen to hide their actions to protect themselves from legal repercussions yet also acting in what they believe is the best interest of their patients. While it is the case that ancient times euthanasia was practiced the focus of the book remained

on the modern context. With this information in hand one must make final consideration to the legality of the issue. According to Keown (1995) in a sub article written by Dieter Giesen it is the case that there are a number of controversial decisions made by superior courts in a number of nations. Although it is the case that Euthanasia is legal in some countries and districts the practice is extremely heavily regulated and examined. Definitions have become pivotal in the act of euthanasia. For example in some regions euthanasia is completely illegal however in general terms ‘suicide’ has been largely decriminalized but assisting suicide may or may not be illegal. Moreover by withholding or withdrawing treatment one could also be considered as actively assisting the act of euthanasia. All of these issues make the situation more complicated so special consideration must be made for legal ramifications on all fronts. References Butler, K. (June 18th 2010) What Broke My Father’s Heart. The New York Times. [online] Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/20/magazine/20pacemaker-t.html?ref=euthanasia> Accessed on January 10th 2011. Dowbiggin, I. (2005) A Concise History of Euthanasia: Life, Death, God and Medicine. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Plymouth, United Kingdom. Keown, J (1995) Euthanasia Examined: Ethical, Clinical and Legal Perspectives. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, United Kingdom. The Telegraph (February 5th 2010) BBC accused of ‘promoting euthanasia by ignoring rights of disabled’. [online] Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/20/magazine/20pacemaker-t.html?ref=euthanasia> Accessed on January 10th 2010. Ward, B., Tate, P. (1994) Attitudes among NHS Doctors to Requests for Euthanasia. British Medical Journal (BMJ); 308 : 1332 (Published 21 May 1994)