

Euthanasia, assisted suicide, and suicide - should it be allowed?

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Who's Life Is It Anyway? Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide, Suicide

Active and passive euthanasia have been a controversial subject that most cannot agree upon. Active euthanasia is where a person such as a doctor takes an affirmative action towards killing a patient such as using lethal doses of morphine. On the other hand, passive euthanasia is where a doctor withholds treatments and lets the patient die out of their illness. Some people might consider one of the two options better than the other while some do not see them distinct. As such, this paper aims to look at the two avenues side by side in order for one to draw informed conclusions about them.

Many people are opposed to the act of killing. However, with the case of euthanasia, it is considered human to end a patient's suffering whether actively or passively. Even Christians and Jews alike have not been seen to change this view significantly. Many, especially medical practitioners, are of the opinion that it is morally right to cease treatment of those considered beyond curing and allow them to die (Rachels 106). According to Rachels, doctors are faced with choosing between the two types of euthanasia when it comes to terminally ill patients (107). However, their choice is usually limited to passive euthanasia where they could withhold treatment in order to end the suffering of a patient in excruciating pain. Active euthanasia is not an option due to obvious legal reasons, so the doctor would opt to withhold treatment so as to fasten the death of such a patient. Thus, passive

euthanasia seems to have prevalence in the case where legality is the underlying factor.

Rachels does not support either choice, however. In his view, there is no reason to prefer one method over the other as a matter of principle (Rachels 108). The mere fact of one case being active and the other passive does not make one morally better than the other. Instead, he argues, the two are morally equivalent: either both should be accepted or not. In this reasoning, if one considers active euthanasia as wrong, then the person would have to consider passive euthanasia as equally immoral. However, Rachels goes on to say that he prefers to consider the two as morally equal (108). None is superior over the other, as many are prone to believe.

Doctors are faced with three options when it comes to the life of a terminal patient such as one with throat cancer, diagnosed to die within a week. The first choice is to end that patient's life using a lethal injection. The second would be to refrain from treatment though this would still prolong the pain for a day or two before the patient died. Finally, the third option would be to do everything possible to sustain the patient's life until the person deceases as a result of the illness. Since the first option is obviously not at their immediate disposal, the traditional view gives doctors the second one as it acts on the humane side of killing. However, this view has its consequences as the patient would still have to suffer the pain as compared to the first option, which would relieve them of pain immediately (Rachels 109). The traditional view, therefore, does not give a clear justification as to the merits of having a standpoint on one preference over the other.

In a bid to make clear the difference between the moral grounds of the two points of view, Rachels comes in with the counter-arguments. In this scenario, many people find it hard to distinguish whether killing is far worse than letting another person die. Killing is forbidden by legal systems and is not right from a moral standpoint as one is not supposed to cause harm to someone else. However, one is not morally obligated to help another person if they do not wish it, which mainly bases the act of letting someone else die. As such, doctors are not plagued by guilt when they withhold treatment of a terminal patient as they consider the illness to be the cause of the death (Rachels 110). On the other hand, if they actively ended the life of a patient, it would make feelings of guilt crop up as they would then consider themselves the cause of the death and not the illness, which then means that passive euthanasia is considered better over active killing as it is more human in this case.

It is quite hard to choose between active and passive euthanasia because of the moral intricacies involved, and one cannot be considered to be less moral by choosing one over the other. Thus, the two should be regarded as moral equals, as one cannot conclusively determine which is better over the other. It is quite impossible to give a definite answer as to whether or not one should choose passive over active euthanasia.