

# My point of view on assisted suicide



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PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE A highly charged issue with both proponents and detractors, euthanasia remains hotly contested in the United States as well as around the world. Euthanasia is the intentional killing of a human being for his or her supposed benefit. Importantly, euthanasia is an intentional act which results in the death of an individual, usually someone who is suffering from a severe or terminal illness. Also known as physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia is a hotly contested issue with proponents and detractors on both sides of the spectrum. The issue of euthanasia/assisted suicide has been particularly controversial of late, particularly due to the sensational trials of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, an unrepentant medical practitioner who openly engaged in euthanasia among terminally ill patients and a recent case in the United Kingdom in which Mr. Alan Reyes of East London publicly helped his partner end his life and was subsequently arrested for the subsequent death of his partner of twenty eight years. Dr. Kevorkian, was incarcerated for eight years for helping people to die, and is reported to have participated in at least 130 assisted suicides. To understand the complexities surrounding euthanasia today as the debate continues, the following will address both sides of the coin and explore euthanasia from a holistic perspective. This essay begins now with a concise introduction to euthanasia and the ethical, social and legal aspects of euthanasia in America (CNN 1999; BBC 2009; StopPain 2009).

From an ethical and legal standpoint the euthanasia issue is heavily charged and polarizing. Anti-euthanasia advocates argue that doctor assisted suicide is murder and that it must be opposed on both ethical and legal grounds.

Pro-euthanasia advocates believe that the right to life is an intrinsic right and no one can tell a person when he or she can end their life. The decision end

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one's life is thus a personal decision and the state has no place telling a terminally ill person that he or she cannot make a conscious decision and choose to put an end to his or her life. From a purely legal standpoint, all forms of euthanasia remain illegal in all 48 of the 50 states of the United States (both Oregon and Washington presently allow a limited form of doctor-assisted suicide) and most of the Western world. In Europe, notable exceptions include Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Despite this, all forms of doctor assisted suicide remain illegal in much of the developed world including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, 48 jurisdictions in the United States and Canada. As we have seen with Dr. Jack Kevorkian and the UK's Alan Reyes, participating in an assisted suicide can carry harsh penalties and is a crime throughout much of the world. Dr. Kevorkian famously said however, "dying is not a crime" (Death with Dignity National Centre 2009).

#### MY OPINION

The term euthanasia is derived from the Greek phrase for "good death" and I believe that people should have the right to choose to end their lives if they see fit. Euthanasia can be a positive thing for someone who is terminally ill or living with extreme pain. When it comes down to it, euthanasia is all about personal choice and individual freedom and the right of an individual to choose what he or she wants to do with his or her life matter more than what society thinks is correct or appropriate. The freedom of choice and freedom to choose one's own path in life and in death is what is important and should not be obstructed by the state or criminal authorities. As a result, euthanasia is not murder but an elective procedure to terminate one's life and to die with dignity. From a legal standpoint, euthanasia remains illegal in most

states in the Union as well as in many places around the world but legal challenges to the prohibition against euthanasia are becoming more and more frequent and the issue remains in the public eye (The Seattle Times 2008; Death with Dignity Centre 2009).

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