Ethical Questioning Of Euthanasia Essay, Research Paper

Ethical Questioning of Euthanasia

Euthanasia. Is it a justifiable idea? And if it is, under what circumstances should it be allowed? To help clarify terms: Euthanasia pertains to a death which functions to benefit the person who dies. This death ultimately requires a final act by someone other than the person who dies. There are many ways this question can be approached and dealt with. In this case I ll be referring to a hypothetical situation involving a patient dubbed MB . This woman has suffered severe brain damage as a result of an aneurysm. However her condition is not a classic comatose state. Her waking and sleeping patterns are noticeable as are her responses to pain and pleasure stimuli. Her speech is limited to groans which seem to convey displeasure. She has no noticeable reactions to speech, is able to be mouth fed, and appears to not recognize her family. Financially there are no difficulties posed for the family.

Many euthanasia cases are centered around situations similar to this, and are often justified by proving the patient is essentially dead . The term essentially dead is difficult to define because of matters of personal morals. In my own opinion essentially dead refers to the loss of enough brain function as to prevent the subject from carrying out even the most minimal of cognitive functions. As far as the human aspect of the subject goes, he or she is dead; the only thing left is the biological remains of what used to be that person.

Now the question is: Is MB essentially dead ? In some aspects she certainly is not. Her reactions to pain and pleasure stimuli are synonymous with each respective stimulus (i.e. she reacts positively to positive stimuli and negatively to negative stimuli). Along the same lines, she also displays emotions of displeasure by means of groaning. All of these are signs of cognitive function occurring in the brain. This, however, does not mean to say that she is aware of her condition or, for that matter, her own existence. Her ability to be aware of reality and ultimately her existence, should be weighed heavily when considering whether or not she should be classified as essentially dead . What should also be taken into consideration is the fact that this state which she is in is permanent; her brain damage is irreversible and as such her brain will never function normally. With these factors weighted properly, the observer would seem to come to the conclusion that MB is, in fact, essentially dead . She cannot function as a human being; thus she is no longer a human being, but instead a human body. Her cognitive life has ceased and only her biological life remains.

With MB now classified as essentially dead , should we be allowed end the biological life of her now non-MB body? With the interests of the family in mind, we should. The family should not be made to deal with the agony of having the essentially lifeless body of MB continue to biologically live, when there is no hope for human life to return to it. The next question would now be: May we end her life? Once again the family should have the say in whether or not the body should continue to live. The fact is MB no longer can make this decision; not because she is not cognate, but because she no longer exists as a personality. Because of this, the body has to be placed in the hands of someone to make the decision to end the body s life, by whatever means are appropriate

Euthanasia (as controversial as it may be) certainly has means by which it can and may be justified. Any case in which a person can be classified as essentially dead falls into this justifiable category. There is absolutely no reason why a body lacking human cognizance should be required to live. It is entirely appropriate to put the burden of making the choice of what should be done to body into a cognizant humans hands. In this way the body has an almost surrogate means by which it can be handled.