Euthanasia Essay, Research Paper

Euthanasia: Right or Wrong

Euthanasia comes from a Greek term good death . However, the word has gained a much more complicated meaning in the recent times. Euthanasia is a rationally considered plan to end a life because of pain and suffering due to a terminal illness. The controversy surrounding euthanasia and the arguments supporting or protesting the practice have raised serious concern and problems in the medical field for years, as well as society, and the world as a whole.

Those in favor of euthanasia, think that it should be legal and voluntary. This suggests that the patient requesting the service is capable of making this decision based on the severity of their illness. Most proponents believe that any form of active euthanasia should only be restricted to those who are terminally ill and in extreme pain, and only carried out by a health professional. Proponents of euthanasia argue that “mercy killing” is necessary because patients, particularly those with terminal illness, experience uncontrollable pain. They argue that the only way to alleviate the pain is to eliminate the patient. But is there a better way?

Those who are opposed to euthanasia say yes. They believe that the pain is manageable and can be treated and controlled. According to a 1992 manual produced by the Washington Medical Association Pain Management and Care of the Terminal Patient, “adequate interventions exist to control pain in 90 to 99% of patients.” Some believe that patients are giving up too soon, and aren t trying to cope with the pain or taking measures to ease the pain, they are just looking for an easy way out, which in this case is euthanasia. They fear that if euthanasia is legalized that a human life would mean less. Fear that doctors will have more power in which they could kill their patient without their permission. Many fear that mentally and physically disabled people will not receive the same treatment as everyone else and that their lives would mean less than a healthy person. They believe with euthanasia the United States will turn into a Nazi Germany with euthanasia camps spread out through the country. They believe the mentally sick, physically disabled, and old will be killed without their permission. That is where the debate over which form is acceptable.

There are two types of euthanasia: passive euthanasia and voluntary active euthanasia. Passive euthanasia is simply ending artificial life support in order to prolong life. By some it is considered good medical practice, and is usually performed on terminally ill patients. Terminally ill patients are those who cannot continue to live without medical technology assisting them, and also will never be conscious or coherent, due to brain damage or other causes, ever again. There are three ways that this procedure is performed. One is a living will. This is where a person of sound mind and body prepares a legal document, usually before they fall ill, saying that they do not want any extordanary life saving techniques performed during cardiac failure. The second is where a person hands over all their medical decisions to a person to whom they have discussed all their wishes about how far they wish the doctor to go before stopping medical treatment. The final way is usually the most difficult. It is when a patient has lost conciseness and will never regain it. Then it is up to the family if they want further medical treatment or wish to let nature take its course. Most feel the living will is the best course of action due to the fact it clearly states patient s wishes in a legally binding document.

Active euthanasia involves intentional hastening the death of a terminally ill patient who requests to avoid painful and prolonged death. Active euthanasia is simply the patients request to end their life, either because of endless or excruciating pain, or because they will never recover from their illness or disease. There are documented cases of this form of euthanasia in Holland. Although not yet legalized it is commonly practiced. They re strict guidelines governing this type of death. The patient must request this action at least two times. They must be terminally ill and in extreme pain and also have a limited time to live. Before the doctor can proceed with the patient s request he must get a second doctor opinion that has no attachment to the case.

Euthanasia has become an extremely volatile issue in our society. The question of ethical and legal perspectives hammers patients and their doctors. Within the topic of euthanasia another conflict arises over the most humane way to end one s suffering: passive or active euthanasia. By society s present standards, passive euthanasia is considered more humane than active euthanasia because it is letting nature take its course. However, voluntary active euthanasia can be more humane for the terminally ill if stipulations and safeguards are made in the implementation of its use. In Washington a bill was laid before the voters on whether active euthanasia should be allowed within the state. Although rejected by little more than 20% most argue it was vague and guidelines were too lenient

Euthanasia is often confused with assisted suicide, a similar event with a much different meaning. Assisted suicide consists of a person administering a drug in order to help another in committing suicide. There are two kinds of euthanasia. Passive euthanasia occurs when a person is in a persistent vegetative state. Life support would be removed, or all medical procedures would be stopped. Active euthanasia, death is caused through a direct action. In most cases a doctor is giving painkillers to a patient in doses strong enough to relieve the pain. This procedure will slow the respiration and hasten the patient s death. This is always frowned upon by most of the medical profession, but is commonly over looked. Most doctors feel it was the only way to stop the patient s chronic pain and a chance they felt needed to be taken.

The most well known person to perform assisted-suicide would be Dr. Jack Kevorkian. There are well-documented situations where Dr. Kevorkian has performed assisted suicides with a machine he had created in his spare time. Due to his actions the debate over doctor assisted euthanasia has increased. The debate is whether the doctor has enough medical information to properly determine that the patient is truly suffering and is terminally ill. Dr. Kevorkian has faced a jury numerous times but has never been found guilty. Due to the vague laws on assisted-suicide, many states have passed laws to forbid such actions based on the actions of this man. He maintains that he will help any terminally ill patient who wishes to put an end to their pain and suffering.

Most people on both sides of the debate disagree with Dr. Kevorkian s actions. Most feel he acts in haste. None of his assisted suicide victims were his patients. He did not know their medical or mental history. Most of his victims were elderly and were known to fear growing old and no longer being able to care for themselves. The younger patients of his were known to suffer from extreme cases of depression and therefore could not rationally make their own decision on whether or not continue living

There is no denying the controversy associated with the topic of euthanasia. There are many opinions allied with the right to end one s life if they are suffering. Some groups feel that it should be illegal, others feel it should be legalized. Regardless, the question remains, should a person be given the option to request assistance in dying?