Euthanasia Essay, Research Paper

Euthanasia

One of the most recent political issues that has come up has been euthanasia. Being form Michigan I am very familiar with this topic, since we just had a proposition to legalize assisted-suicide. I am a strong supporter of euthanasia, and feel that it is a person right to end their suffering if they feel that it is too great to live with. Euthanasia is tolerated in the medical field under certain circumstances when a patient is suffering profoundly and death is inevitable. Each person may define euthanasia differently. Who is to decide whether a death is good or not? Is any form of death good? Each person can answer all of these questions differently. It is generally taken today to mean that act which a health care professional carries out to help his/her patient achieve a good death.

Auto-euthanasia or assisted suicide can be justified by the average supporter of the so-called “right to die movement” for many reasons: The first reason is that an advanced terminal illness is causing unbearable suffering to the individual. This suffering is the most common reason to seek an early end. My family was faced with this issue 3 years ago when my grandfather was very ill. Until you see someone who is actually suffering it is very hard to understand how and why euthanasia could be the correct choice. It is still very hard for me to talk about my grandfather, but after seeing him suffer I have no doubt in my mind that euthanasia can help many people end their suffering. The second reason to perform euthanasia is because of a grave physical handicap exists that is so restricting that the individual cannot, even after due care, counseling, and re-training, tolerate such a limited existence. This handicap is a fairly rare reason for suicide; most impaired people cope remarkably well with their affliction, but there are some who would, at a certain point, rather die.

There are many ethical guidelines for euthanasia in today s society. If the following guidelines are met, then euthanasia is considered acceptable to me. The person must be a mature adult, this is essential. The exact age will depend on the individual and their suffering, but the person should not be a minor. Secondly, the person must have clearly made a conscious decision. An individual has the ability now to indicate this with a living will, and can also, in today’s more open and tolerant society, freely discuss the option of euthanasia with health-care professionals, family, and lawyers. The euthanasia must not be carried out at the first knowledge of a life-threatening illness, and reasonable medical help must have been sought to cure or at least slow down the terminal disease. I do not believe in giving up life the minute a person is informed that he or she has a terminal illness. Life is precious, you only live once, and it is worth a fight. It is when the fight is clearly hopeless and the agony, physical and mental, is unbearable that a final exit should be an option. The patients doctor should be informed, asked to be involved, and his or her response been taken into account. The physician’s response will vary depending on the circumstances and their personal views, of course. It is best to inform the doctor and hear his or her response. For example, the patient might be mistaken about the severity of their illness. Perhaps the diagnosis has been misheard or misunderstood. Patients raising this subject were met with a discreet silence or meaningless remarks in the past, but in today’s more accepting climate most physicians will discuss potential end of life actions. The person should also have a Will disposing of his or her worldly effects and money. This shows evidence of a clear mind, an orderly life, and forethought to what will come. All which are important to an acceptance of rational suicide.

The person must have made plans to die that do not involve others in criminal liability or leave them with guilty feelings. Assistance in suicide is a crime in most places, although the laws are gradually changing, and very few cases ever come before the courts. Michigan recently voted against Proposal B which would have legalized assisted suicide. The only well-known instance of a lawsuit concerning this is the doctor-assisted suicide by Dr. Kevorkian, who coincidently I have met a few times in our home town of Royal Oak, Mi. My personal opinion of Dr. Kevorkian is that he is a caring man who has only been trying to help individuals relieve the pain in their lives by the only means left. I feel that before the person carries out euthanasia they should leave a statement saying exactly why he or she is taking their life. This statement in writing removes the chance of misunderstandings or blame being put on others. It also demonstrates that the departing person is taking full responsibility for the action. .

There has been controversy over the means in which a person carries out

euthanasia and to what extent the doctor should be involved. “I’m facing a debilitating disease which has led to a quality of life that is not satisfactory to me. I refuse

to live by healthy people’s rules. I want choice.” (Austin Bastable, MS sufferer) Who has

the right to tell this man that he has to suffer the rest of his life? It was impossible for me

to watch my grandfather everyday as his illness slowly overtook him. So what are our

choices when it comes to euthanasia? Disconnecting respiratory devices is not an

acceptable method of euthanasia. It causes the patient to starve for oxygen and gasp

for it, but when he or she cannot breathe, the body is starved of oxygen and

suffocates. This is not merciful by any means. “One reason why so many people think

that there is an important moral difference between active and passive euthanasia is

that they think killing someone is morally worse than letting someone die” (Leon

Kass) . The idea that a patient utilizes a medical device and has grown dependent on it

for life is a grim one indeed, which I would not like rely on. However, relieving a

patient who relies on this machine for his or her life by simply cutting it off is not

acceptable. Simply stopping medical intervention and allowing nature to take its

course is fundamentally different from mercy killing. For one thing, death does not

necessarily follow the discontinuance of treatment. Euthanasia is the physical

action of putting someone to a painless death who is suffering tremendously. The

passive nature of allowing someone to die is not euthanasia. This is not a physical

action taken by a doctor to ease a patient’s suffering and agony

The doctor should decide whether the ailment is curable and if it is not, he or

she should decide whether the patient will live productively for months or even years

to come. If the ailment is not immediately fatal, will it cause pain and suffering for the

rest of the patient’s life? How old is the patient? Will he or she live much longer

anyway? All these factors should come into play when deciding whether a patient

should consider euthanasia. The doctor’s answers to these questions may differ from

those of the patient and his or her family. It is up to the patient’s doctor to

decide whether the patient’s ailment is indeed curable. The patient should be presented

with the facts. The doctor should tell the patient exactly how it is and not project the

false hope that the patient may recover. With this information, the patient can make an

informed decision and feel that it is the best one. Sidney Hook states in his “In

Defense of Voluntary Euthanasia” that “Each one should be permitted to make his

own choice-especially when no one else is harmed by it. The responsibility for the

decision, whether deemed wise or foolish, must be with the chooser” . This is

evidenced quite simply by the mere fact that everyone has civil rights and liberties. No

one can decide who should die and who should not. Those who we do not let die are

forced to suffer, is that what we really want? Everyone is in complete control

of his/her own life and should be free to decide.

After considering the arguments in favor of euthanasia, the person should also look at the arguments against it. First, should the person go into a hospice program instead and receive not only first-class pain management but also comfort care and personal attention? Put simply, hospices make the best of a bad job, and they do so with great skill and love. The right-to-die movement supports their work, but not everyone wants a lingering death and not everyone wants that form of care. My family looked into local hospices for my grandfather but he decided against it. Today many terminally ill people take the marvelous benefits of home hospice programs and still accelerate the end when suffering becomes too much, this is what my family chose for my grandfather. A few hospice leaders claim that their care is so perfect that there is absolutely no need for anyone to consider euthanasia. While I have no wish to criticize them, they are wrong to claim this. Most terminal pain can today be controlled with the sophisticated use of drugs, but the point these leaders miss is that personal quality of one’s live is foremost to some people. If one’s body has been destroyed by disease to the point that it is not worth living than that is an intensely individual decision, which should not be swayed. In some cases of the final days in hospice care, when the pain is very serious, the patient is drugged into unconsciousness. Is that not the same as euthanasia? If that way is acceptable to the patient, then so be it, but some people do not wish their final hours to be in that fashion. There should be no conflict between hospice and euthanasia, both are valid options in a caring society. Both are appropriate to different people with differing values.

The other point to consider when talking about euthanasia is personal religious values. Does suffering glorify a person before death as some religions believe? Is suffering, as related to Jesus Christ’s suffering on the cross, a part of the preparation for meeting God? Some people see it that way and for that reason object to euthanasia. Remember that there are millions of atheists, as well as people of differing religions, and they all have rights, too. Many Christians who believe in euthanasia justify it by reasoning that the God whom they worship is loving and tolerant, and would not wish to see them in agony. They do not see their God as being so vengeful as refusing them the Kingdom of Heaven if they shorten the end of their life to avoid prolonged, unbearable suffering. I personally feel that if there is a God he would find no fault in man for attempting to relieve his own pain. A doctor should not be allowed to “play God” and decide who should live and who should die. It is the patient’s life and he or she has to live it, no one else knows their pain. So, it is only logical to allow the patient, and no one else, to decide.

There is another argument that ending a life short of its natural death is robbing the person of valuable time spent with family and friends. Is that last period of love and companionship with family and friends worth hanging on for? Not if it is at the expense of one suffering unbearably pain. Even the most determined supporters of euthanasia hang on until the last minute; sometimes too long, and lose control. They, too, gather with their families and friends to say goodbyes. There are important reunions and often farewell parties. Euthanasia supporters enjoy life and love living, and their respect life is as strong as anybody’s. Yet they are willing, if their dying is distressing to them, to give up a few weeks or a few days at the very end and leave under their own control. Ultimately, the decision lies with the beholder. It is the right of a person to make his/her own choice, with some limitations. It is the doctor’s responsibility to provide the patient with an accurate prognosis so that the patient may make an educated decision. Everyday we fill our lives with a thousand distractions, we always known that death awaits us as the natural end of the precious gift of life. The day we receive a terminal prognosis we enter completely unknown territory. No one wants to die. To know that we are to die soon is to confront our doubts, our fears, our deep attachments, and our own powerlessness. The task placed before us, with terminal illness, is the challenge of finding the courage to face death’s mystery. Why should we make a human being have to suffer more than necessary, who is to say that a person is not allowed to do with their body, and their lives as they choose? By doing this, the people who do not allow, and do not want euthanasia to be practiced are playing God more than anyone. Forcing patients to suffer until the very end when they finally just give up. Euthanasia is an act to help a suffering person die in peace, and after living through a situation where I saw first hand how much suffering one can endure I wish it upon no one .