Euthanasia Today Essay, Research Paper

Euthanasia has been, and always will be, a controversial moral and ethical subject. While the majority of both Americans and Canadians seem to support euthanasia as indicated by the latest polls, it is still illegal in both countries. I think it is important to first distinguish between passive euthanasia and active euthanasia. Passive euthanasia is the stopping or not starting some treatment which allows a person to die. Active euthanasia, the more controversial of the two, is doing something such as administering a lethal drug or using other means that cause a person’s death. My main focus will be on active euthanasia. A prime example of active euthanasia is the Robert Latimer case. Latimer was given a life sentence with no chance of parole for ten years after being convicted of second degree murder in the “mercy killing” of his severely disabled daughter. I will discuss reasons why some people support euthanasia, why others oppose it, and then offer my own opinion. People who support euthanasia believe that terminally ill patients have the right to die with respect and dignity. They believe it is the only humane, merciful choice for those “living to die”. Euthanasia for them would provide freedom from the guilt of being a burden to caregivers. From the caregivers perspective it is also the only humane choice. Many of them see it as the ultimate act of love because of the consequences of that action. Supporters of euthanasia also argue that extending the life of a terminally ill patient by artificial means is unethical. That is, doctors are ?playing God? when they resist the natural progression of a fatal disease when there is no cure or hope of one. In addition, they argue that current medications for pain and palliative care for the dying are inadequate. Arguments against euthanasia are many. The most controversial, of course, is the religious belief that life is sacred and suffering is an important part of every human life. From a moral and legal perspective, active euthanasia is an act of murder because murder, by definition, is an unlawful premeditated killing of one human being by another. Euthanasia, then, violates a person’s right to be protected from harm. From a medical standpoint, there are several reasons not to support it. First of all, euthanasia is contrary to a doctor?s oath to save lives. Secondly, suffering can be alleviated medically in most cases. Psychotherapy is a valuable tool in coping with the depression that accompanies terminal illness. In addition, in cases where a patient is semi-conscious, there is no certainty that consent is voluntary. Then there is always the possibility of a mistaken diagnosis. Sometimes patients experience a complete remission from their illness. There is also the possibility of a new cure being discovered. Finally, if euthanasia is legalized, there is the danger that doctors could abuse it. I support euthanasia in certain situations where the pain in a terminal illness cannot be controlled and the damage from the illness is irreversible. In these cases, a panel of doctors should be available to help patients and their families make the choice that is right for them. Never, under any circumstances, should a parent of other person have the right to make a life-death decision when the patient is unable to make the decision for himself/herself. One exception is when doctors ask parents to make that decision where “preemies” or newborns have no chance of survival. The other, of course, is when a person is “brain dead”. Homicide is acceptable in cases of self-defense, therefore, I believe euthanasia should be acceptable as an act of mercy in certain cases. I don’t know if legalizing euthanasia is the answer because of the possible abuse of the law. Perhaps, changing the homicide law to allow euthanasia under strict conditions would be a better solution. Perhaps, putting it to a referendum would be the only answer. I hope that I will never be confronted with this choice, but in my heart I know that I would make the right one, because it would be made out of love.