How Far Do You Think ?Whose Life Is It Anyway Is A Play About The Individual Versus Authority And Bu Essay, Research Paper

Whose

life is it Anyway? is about Ken Harrison, a paralysed patient in hospital, and

his battle to end his own life. The problem here is that he is incapable of

committing suicide and has to turn to euthanasia. The hospital is against this.

They cannot conscion deliberately letting a conscious person die. In this essay

I will tackle the question above, of whether this play is purely about the

ethical and moral issues involved, or whether it is also about the man versus

the system. For

these purposes, Ken Harrison, the patient, is the individual and the hospital

the bureaucracy and authority. ??????????????? The title of the play, ?Whose

life is it anyway?? announces the issue. It is evidently Ken?s life, but the

amount of choice and free will he now has in it is minimal. Nowadays, human

rights are accepted as being inalienable, so the absence of freedom and choice

makes you wonder just how much of a life he is now in possession of. Of course,

as well, despite the fact it is his life he isn?t running it. Hence the title.

This starts the play with a question and all further events are in answer to

it. This shows it is meant to be, partly, a battle of wills between two sides

over his life. ??????????????? Ken is very much alone in that

his disability makes him different and distances him from the people he

encounters. For example, he says to Dr. Scott, ?It?s surprising how relaxed a

woman can be when she is not in the presence of man.? He is saying very plainly

he doesn?t feel he is a man any longer. Dr. Scott feels sorry for him, and he

likes her, maybe even loves her – but he feels her pity as an insult. It also

disturbs him. He feels himself changing, doing things he wouldn?t normally do,

and not being in control is unsettling for him. This isolates him and shows him

as standing on his own as a result of an accident, not by choice as is usual in

cases of rebellion against bureaucracy ??????????????? No close friends come and see

him – he sent them away. He is alone by choice ,as well as because of his

accident.? In response to a question

from the psychiatrist about any relationships, he says ?A fiancee actually. I

asked her not to visit me any more. About a fortnight ago.? He sent her away

because he feels she didn?t really want to stay with him, she was just doing it

out of a sense of duty. It was meant to ?release her from the guilt she would

feel if she did what she really wanted to.? He claims he sent people away

because he didn?t like to be the way in which they punished themselves. He

doesn?t want to be a duty, unpleasant but which makes you feel better when you?ve

done it. He has separated himself from others as a result of choice, which

counteracts the previous point. ??????????????? The people who he does have

contact with, the medical staff, he feels hold back from him. He refers to them

as gods; ?[Dr. Emerson] will sweep in here like Zeus from Olympus, with his

attendant nymphs and swains?. Nymphs and swains imply the others are

subservient to Dr. Emerson. It?s a fair comparison. The medical staff are

omniscient, all-powerful and hold the power of life and death over him.

Although they only mean it to be good for him and they just want to help, he

cannot do anything without them or anything that they do not want him to do.

They have physical power over him because he is incapacitated and cannot

survive without help, and they have mental power over him because the law is on

their side. They are also aggressively cheerful which he feels is infringing

his right to be miserable. Because of this he calls the ?the monstrous regiment?

and reminds them that they can?t say anything personal or in anyway negative

because they work ?in the optimism industry? and must be professional, i.e.

distant at all times. All these collective terms solidify them and class them

as the opposition or the enemy. They are firmly marked as THEM not us. This

segregation defines the sides and shows it as Ken vs. everyone else. I think

this raises the topic of individualism vs. groups. ??????????????? The hospital can also administer

drugs to him against his will, if they think it is good for him. ( after being

injected) ?Doctor, I didn?t give you permission to stick that needle in me.? He

can?t defend himself and they have every right, apparently, to do whatever they

feel necessary with no thought for his wishes. The word stick implies that is

it a rough action, although it probably wasn?t because he is a trained doctor

and Ken is not putting up any opposition. I think it was the invasion of

privacy and direct contradiction of his wishes that he objected to. This is

just a small confrontation, but it is definitely a case of the authority versus

Ken. Ken is losing. ??????????????? At one point during the play Ken?s

lawyer, Mr. Kershaw, says to Dr. Emerson ?You wouldn?t like to find yourself

powerless in the hands of, say, a lawyer or a bureaucrat. I wouldn?t like to

find myself powerless in the hands of a doctor.? This is the most direct answer

to the question that is found in the text. And it?s not very direct. Dr.

Emerson is asked to accept the fact that he has unreasonable power over Ken and

that if he was in a similar situation he would not be content. This shows that

the medical staff are to Ken as a lawyer or bureaucrat would be to a ?normal?

person. The two occupations mentioned are ones generally mistrusted. Maybe this

is meant to point out that Ken mistrusts doctors irrationally, and the fact

that he actually has reason to now is merely a coincidence. This reinforces the

picture of a lone man struggling against the system. ??????????????? The subject under discussion

throughout the play is euthanasia. As this is illegal now, a play about it

would have to represent the individual in question vs. authority. The purpose

of the story might have been merely to present the ethical issues without

dragging in a question of how far bureaucracy has the power (and by what

authority) to run our lives. ??????????????? While Ken does try to distance

himself from the staff, and feels uncomfortable with the large part they play

in his life, he has friendships with many of them. He flirts and toys with

Sister and Nurse Sadler, he sees John as an equal because he is the most

sympathetic to his position, and Dr. Scott is a good friend to him. Although

all these people with the exception of John and possible exception of Dr. Scott

want him to live, I feel that they could be swayed one way or the other and if

he begged would allow him to die. His only real opponents to his plan are Dr.

Emerson and anyone else Dr. Emerson brings in to help his case. Because the

majority of the authority are on his side, I don?t think it can be said that is

it about the individual vs. authority. ??????????????? The doctors are there to serve

people. They have trained, and gained knowledge and skill, in order to help

patients. ?Patients need knowledge to make good decisions?. This says that the

patients choose what to do themselves and the doctors are there to carry it out

or advise. If the patient is unquestionably sane this probably does happen, but

when the patient?s mental health can be called into question the doctor uses

his/her own judgement. They are not distant authority figures, but real people

who have lives just like everyone else. They are not perfect. The fact they

work with and for their patients, or at least try to, says that they are not

against Ken, just trying to help him in a different way. this may be the wrong

way as far as he is concerned but they are trying. This is born out by the

judge?s statement at the end ?I am convinced all parties acted in good faith.?

It basically sums up everything that the play was about.

The

play is about Ken fighting against authority, nearly as much as it is about

whether euthanasia or suicide is morally acceptable. The fact I could find few

argument to support the opposite arguments shows this. However, my main one,

that he has many allies who work for the hospital, lessens the certainty of

that view, as does the fact that doctors are there to help people and they are

not allowed to go against a sane patients wishes. There are no black and

whites, only grey. All parties concerned were only doing what they thought was

best for Ken. Where they differed is that the hospital team refused to accept

that Ken deserved to have a say in his future, or lack of one. They also

thought that living is always better than dying, and again I think that is

something that has to be considered for each situation. Whatever the motive,

and however well meaning this was, the play is about one man fighting for his

right to end a ?shadow of a life?, against an authority who cannot conscion him

dying.