Philosophy Essay, Research Paper

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Question 2

Legalize Active Euthanasia

I believe that the law should be changed to allow active euthanasia because it is a person?s freedom to determine their time of death if given the opportunity. This paper will discuss what it is like to lose a person through a painful death and how the good consequences of legalizing active euthanasia outweigh the bad consequences. It will further examine the moral permissibility and the question of adopting social policy that sanctions active euthanasia.

Watching a person suffer from a terminal, painful disease is one of the worst experiences I ever went through. My grandmother had stomach cancer and was diagnosed too late to even attempt to save her. She lay in a hospital bed for the last three months of her life not knowing when her last day would come, only waiting for the pain killers to take effect. She could not eat any food because the cancer would eat anything she put in her stomach, so along with dying of cancer she was starving to death. She died a week before my birthday after months of pain. I only went to visit her once because just looking at her frail frame hurt, she wasn?t the same grandma I had all my life and she just looked so tired and in so much pain. The night before she died she told one of her friends that she could not fight anymore, the next morning the fight ended.

If active euthanasia were an option then my grandma would not have had to suffer as much as she did. She would not have had to go all those weeks in extreme pain; she would have been able to take a lethal dose of medication and could have died peacefully and quietly with all her dignity in hand. There are so many good consequences to legalizing active euthanasia and in my opinion they outweigh the bad consequences.

Self-determination, or autonomy, plays a crucial role in one?s life. Self-determination provides people with the opportunity to make their own decisions based on their own values and beliefs. Self-determination further provides people with the chance to take responsibility for their lives (Brock 165). People think ahead about the last years of their lives. This thought can put a lot of fear in one?s mind, not only the fear of pain and suffering, but the fear of losing all one?s dignity to a dreadful disease. All that a person wants to do as death approaches is come up with a way that preserves the quality of life, allows dignity to be kept, and do all that is humanly possible to avoid a great amount of suffering (Brock 165). Self-determination is what gives them this chance, but without legalizing active euthanasia then they are not able to carry out their decision to end their life with the help of a physician. Every person has responsibility for their life and their life alone. If someone is dying and are in extreme pain then they have the choice to be hooked up to machines or to have a lethal dose of medication, no matter what, it is the patients decision, not the governments.

Another supporting factor to legalizing active euthanasia has to do with physicians and the legalities that they are restricted to. Is active euthanasia was legalized than physicians could provide them at a patient?s request. Providing active euthanasia to the American people would give them a sense of reassurance, sort of like a security blanket. It would assure them that if they were to get fatally ill and be in sufferable pain that there would be a way out. Even if a majority of the population choose not to exercise their right to active euthanasia at least the choice would be there if it were legalized. Active euthanasia would be particularly useful when a person is dying and there is not curable treatment then the doctor should have another option to present to the patient. Right now doctors are not legally allowed to offer euthanasia, no matter what condition the patients are in or no matter how bad the doctor feels for the patient, they cannot offer them the only escape. Physicians are the person that someone goes to if they were sick, so if a patient was dying and wanted to exercise euthanasia then the first person they would go to for help would be their physician. If someone is going to die then they would want their physician there because that would provide them with the guarantee that the suicide/euthanasia will not go wrong and that their wanted end result will happen. The physician can also provide them with a guaranteed, painless death.

The third and probably most powerful argument for legalizing active euthanasia would be the prevention of the pain and suffering that terminally ill patients go through. If a patient can take a medicine that would prolong their life and help with the pain then they should take it. But if there were nothing left then resulting to euthanasia would be the only way to escape from the suffering. It is an argument of mercy and is one of the strongest arguments for legalizing active euthanasia (Brock 170). People can say that there is always something that you can do to relieve pain but one will not really know until they are the patient and the one who is in pain.

There are bad consequences that come with legalizing active euthanasia. The biggest argument probably being the slippery slope saying that there will be a generalization of cases and it could unleash the nasty side of human nature. It says that doctors will get used to killing patients and will end up abusing the right to active euthanasia. There is also the risk that people will see it as too expensive to keep patients in a hospital so physicians and family members will recommend euthanasia to the ill. I believe that these things will not occur because there will be an extensive program to determine if the patient is competent and if the euthanasia is the last possible treatment. I would recommend that two psychiatrists should talk to the patient and determine their competence and the results of all of the other medications they have taken. If the patient is found in the right frame of mind and there are no other curable treatments then active euthanasia would be the best escape from their world of suffering.

Moral permissibility is a big question in the legalizing of active euthanasia. People believe that active euthanasia is the killing of an innocent human being but I believe that it is two people participating in the death of a person. It may be the physician who commits the last action but the process and the idea comes from the patient. It is said to be morally wrong to kill a person but it is not morally permissible to watch a person suffer in pain and anguish for the last days or even hours of their life. If the patient wants to die then they should be supported. It is morally permissible to help another human carry out their dying wish, we may not see it as the right choice but it is not our choice to make. Euthanasia is morally permissible, it does involve death but it is not killing because the patient is dying and is most likely suffering from extreme pain, all the physician is doing is letting a person die in a quicker way. The patient was going to die no matter what; it is just a matter of time and how much the patient has to survive before reaching death.

We should adopt a social policy that sanctions active euthanasia because people deserve the right to determine the time and the conditions under which they die. Death is a person?s last impression they leave on the people they know, most people want it to be dignified. Active euthanasia provides them with this opportunity but in order to give this opportunity we must make active euthanasia a social policy. People are concerned that it will have a bad effect on society but it will provide members of society with the chance to end all pain. Sanctioning active euthanasia will have more benefits than bad as I showed above. It is the right thing to do because it will protect patients from suffering and it will protect families from having to watch one of its members die in a slow painful process.

I believe that the law should be changed to allow active euthanasia. Active euthanasia is morally permissible and should be sanctioned as a social policy. It allows people to die on their own terms and may be easier on the patient and on the family. I don?t know if my grandmother would have considered euthanasia but I do wonder how much pain it would have protected her from.

Bibliography

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