

Euthanasia: The Right to Die

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Background Info.

- Euthanasia
 - Intentionally causing the death of a person, to protect him/her from further suffering than their current state (e.g. a doctor administering a lethal injection causing death)
- Assisted-suicide
 - A non-suicidal person (doctor) knowingly and intentionally provides the means or acts in some way to help a suicidal person (the patient) kill him/herself (e.g. hooking a patient up to a carbon monoxide machine with a mask on and giving them the instructions on how to use it)

Background Info. Cont.

- Withholding from treatment is different from asking for help committing suicide, omission of treatment is not the same as asking for medical intervention which would cause death
- The American Medical Association (AMA) believes that physician-assisted suicide is unethical and inconsistent with the pledge physicians make to devote themselves to healing and life

History

- Hippocrates
 - Hippocrates, for whom the Hippocratic oath is named, said "I will not give poison to anyone though asked to do so, nor will I suggest such a plan"
- Oregon's Measure 16
 - In 1994, Oregon passed one of the world's first laws that made it legal for doctors to help patients commit suicide. Measure 16, the "Death with Dignity Act," allows physicians in Oregon to prescribe, *though not administer*, lethal drugs, i.e., engage in physician-assisted suicide, for competent, terminally ill adult patients who are expected to die within six months. (www.ascensionhealth.org)

Unbearable Pain Argument

- A person suffering with unbearable pain has a right to end the suffering with death
 - If the person can't physically commit the act, another person should be able to assist them
 - Drug induced relaxation and coping is not a dignified way to live
 - Everyone has a right to die with dignity
 - Ending suffering with a death with dignity is morally permissible
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- Therefore, euthanasia is morally permissible

In The Case Of A Vegetative State

- A person in a persistent vegetative state is defined as someone with brain damage that is incapable of cognitive decision making and awareness
 - If no living will is made by the person in a vegetative state, their will should be delegated to the closest relative
 - If the relative has been made aware the person will not recover, they can choose whether or not to continue life
 - The only way for the relative to move on is for them to decide what is right for them, which in some cases may be death
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- Therefore euthanasia is morally permissible

Argument Against Euthanasia

- Euthanasia is the act of one person intentionally killing another person so that the victim will not continue to suffer
- Death as a means to escape pain and suffering is not a dignified way to die, nor is it justified
- In cases of escaping pain through death, intentionally killing someone is morally impermissible
- Therefore, euthanasia is morally impermissible

Argument Against Assisted-Suicide

- Doctors have an obligation to heal and sustain life in patients
- Doctors also have an obligation to obey and accept patients' wishes regarding treatment
- Any instance in which a patient explicitly asks to be euthanized or assisted in the act of suicide contradicts the doctor's obligation to heal and sustain life
- Every person has a right to life
- Since every person has a right to life, the doctor's primary concern when treating someone should be insuring a patient lives as long as possible
- Therefore, assisted-suicide is morally impermissible

Questions

- What obligation do you believe to be more important, the obligation for doctors to heal and sustain life or their obligation to obey the patient's wishes?

Questions

- Grandpa Jack has been suffering from an incurable strain of leprosy for the past year. He is constantly in agonizing pain and has been given less than six months to live. He asks the doctor for a lethal dose of medication to end the suffering.
 - As the doctor, would you administer the dosage to grant Jack's desires?
 - As Jack's family member, do you support Grandpa Jack in his decision?

Sources

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