Mercy Killing Essay, Research Paper

Mercy Killing or Just Plain Killing: The Euthanasia Debate

For as long as people have been around, we have been dying. While this very well may seem to be pointing out the obvious, so many of us forget that we, as humans, are mortal beings. Our life span is definitely finite, and it should be. Just think what would happen if nobody ever died. Even though we are mortal, we try to hang onto our lives as long as we can. Fear of death and wanting to live forever are, after all, part of human nature. Sometimes, however, medicine takes advantage of this aspect of humanity and, to a great extent, capitalizes on it. While it is certainly true that one goal of medicine has always been to prolong life, another goal has been the alleviation of pain and suffering. One point at which these two views collide, often violently, is over the hotly debated issue of euthanasia.

Euthanasia, or mercy killing, as it has been called, is certainly not an issue with just two sides, there are many side to it. Euthanasia, after all, ranges from simply allowing an individual to die naturally without life support or pulling the plug (passive euthanasia), all the way to Jack Kevorkian s suicide machine (active euthanasia). To complicate things further, there is also voluntary euthanasia, Cases in which patient requests to be killed, and dies as a result of action taken by another person, involuntary euthanasia; cases in which no action is requested because the patient is unconscious, senile, or otherwise incapable of making a request, but the person is allowed to die or is killed, and nonvoluntary euthanasia; cases in which a conscious, terminally ill patient states that they do not want to die, but is allowed to die or is killed anyway (http://valdosta.peachnet.edu). While an individual may advocate one form of euthanasia, it is not uncommon for the same person to be completely against another form. There are cases in which euthanasia is wrong, especially cases involving conscious people who are not really in a lot of pain, seeking death. In these cases, some kind of counseling would make a lot more sense than just accepting that these people think they need to die and therefore should. On the other hand, there are also certainly cases where euthanasia is a less painful alternative to what may otherwise lie ahead. In most of these cases, the disease will end up killing the individual anyway, so why prolong pain by putting people with incurable illnesses on life support? After all, as stated before, one of the main goals of medicine is to alleviate pain and suffering. If there is no cure to an illness, and the treatments, as well as the disease are painful, why put the individual, and the family, through financial and emotional anguish?

One problem many of the opponents of euthanasia have with such mercy killing is that it is killing, and, to many, this constitutes murder. To murder, however, by definition, is to kill brutally or inhumanly, (American Heritage Dictionary.) It is possible that very few of the mercy killings that have occurred over the years have been murder; however, suicide would probably be a better word. After all, it is, in most cases, the individual with the disease is the one who make the final decision. Furthermore, is it brutal or inhuman to end somebody s life when it is clear that the life they are living is a life of pain and suffering? By the dictionary definition of murder, it seems that forcing someone to die in pain rather than trying to do something about this would be closer to murder.

Another issue involves how natural these things are; on the one hand, euthanasia, especially active euthanasia, seems unnatural, on the other, so do some other medical procedures. It is not exactly natural, after all to keep somebody alive with all kinds of tubes running in and out of his or her body. Here is where the distinction between illnesses and afflictions that can be healed or cured and ones that cannot becomes important. There is a large difference between somebody who wants to die because he gets in a car accident and breaks a few bones, and someone who wants to die because she has terminal cancer and will die a painful death anyway.

Of course, there are some arguments for the elimination of euthanasia alltogether. Euthanasia is killing; there is no question about it. Even the New England Journal of Medicine admits this; Dr. Ronald Cranford, one of the authors of a report saying that it is moral to give patients information on suicide, publicly acknowledges that this is “the same as killing the patient, (http://www.ieatf.org). In addition, keeping a deathly ill relative or friend on life support can make the transition between life and death much easier for loved ones. That is, instead of having all at once to get used to having a relative or friend not be around physically or mentally, acknowledging such a reality is a gradual transition. Also, it is much easier on the minds of family members and friends for them to know they did all they could to save their dying loved one. It is easy to see how somebody could feel responsible for their loved one s death having allowed doctors to euthanise him or her. Furthermore, if assisted suicide becomes widely accepted, there will undoubtedly be a lot more people dying this way. In Holland, for example, where laws against assisted suicide are largely ignored and rarely enforced, 25,300 cases of assisted suicide occur each year This represents 19.4% of all deaths, (McCord, 22). This is a frightening statistic, which should certainly be considered, along with the previously mentioned facts, when debating the issue of euthanasia.

While it may seem rather out of place in this issue, money certainly is an integral part of the argument for euthanasia. Keeping somebody alive on life support is extremely expensive; About 80% of one s lifetime medical expenses are incurred in the last three weeks of life mostly because of the high costs of life support and intensive care says Pallone, (35). It just does not make much sense to force family members or even insurance companies to pay to keep someone alive when that person is in so much pain that she wishes to die anyway. Especially in the case of terminal illnesses such as cancer, there is absolutely no reason to force people to suffer and die, rather than to just die peacefully.

Yet another issue within euthanasia is the right of the individual to choose when, where and how to die. There are a lot of people who would much rather pass away at home peacefully than to have all kinds of doctors and nurses standing around them. They would much rather die in the comfort of their own bed, away from all the lights, sounds, tubes and hoses of the hospital. While this where aspect of death is relatively uncontroversial, the right of the individual to choose how and when to die is much more hotly debated. It is, after all, the when and how of death over which Dr. Jack Kevorkian, the so-called suicide doctor, attempts to give his patients control. While supporters of Kevorkian and his methods claim that assisted suicide, or active euthanasia, allows people to exercise their God-given right to control their death, opponents say that Kevorkian is playing God. That is, he is trying to control things that people were never meant to control. Now Kevorkian faces Murder for the killing of a person on national television. So Should every case of Euthanasia be Murder? I believe that in some cases it isnt but most cases should be murder, like what Kevorkian has been doing. If I have a family member in serious pain and agony and they are going to die sooner or later, if they ask me to pull the plug, I am going to do it. That in my opinion is not murder.

Death is one of the most feared and dreaded events that human beings ever have to go through. This is probably the main reason that Euthanasia is so controversial. It is human nature for us to try and prolong our lives as long as possible, and, through medicine, we have prolonged them quite a bit. It is important to remember, nevertheless, that sometimes while attempting to fight death, we lose sight of the best interests of the individuals whose lives we are affecting. Are these people not the most qualified people to make this decision? It is, after all, their lives that hang in the balance.

Works Cited

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