

Examine and comment on the moral and religious issues raised by euthanasia.

Euthanasia is a subject that is considered to be extremely difficult as many people have different understandings of what euthanasia means and a lot of people would argue that it is morally wrong to take life if it has been requested by a patient. It is questioned if a doctor should be able to “stop the pain,” however when is euthanasia acceptable and when is it murder? Moral issues such as rights and the ability to “die with dignity” oppose those of religious issues like people “playing God” and the fact that many religions, Christianity in particular, believe in the sanctity of life. The term 'euthanasia' (or 'mercy killing') comes from the Greek word meaning 'good death.' Euthanasia essentially involves giving an easy death to all those suffering intolerably. However, it is thought that this is quite problematic in today's society due to the increasing amount of medicine that can prolong the cause of life whether the patient wants to be alive or not. Dying with the assistance of others can be either active or passive as well as being voluntary or non-voluntary. Active euthanasia is illegal in the UK.

Many people question at what point does the preservation of life become cruelty? This is the main argument for this point which coincides with the issue of patient's right to die with dignity. Although Christians believe life is sacred, surely they would think that it was worse to make a human being suffer? Philosophers such as Plato argued that medical treatment should not be provided to severely ill and disabled patients because life should not be prolonged if the patient in question is severely ill or a disabled individual, because they represent a burden to themselves and others. David Hume also agreed that life could be ended if they wished as we have free will. He said “Suicide cannot be a crime against God or the natural law, because God gave us the ability and, sometimes, the desire to commit suicide, it is not wrong to go against nature by building dams, diverting rivers, etc., and it is not wrong to interfere in matters of life and death, otherwise life-saving surgery would be wrong. Nor can suicide be a crime against the community because being a hermit is not wrong and suicide just takes this withdrawal from society one step further. Finally, suicide cannot be a crime against the self because the individual knows best what is good for him or her.” David Hume illustrates here how if a life was needing to be taken to end suffering then it cannot be a sin against God or anyone else if it is for a greater good for the person. Many patients argue that suicide is not a crime in many countries but assisting suicide is, however if the patient is unable to physically take their own life then assistance may be required and this should not be against the law. It is

also arguable that as many documents such as the bible or Qur'an were written so long ago they can not be regarded in today's society. It could be argued that medical science had not reached this highly advanced state and they probably shouldn't be considered as relevant.

Many Christians would argue that God gave life and only he has the right to remove it. It is argued that all life is sacred no matter how unhappy or painful that life may be. God has entrusted humans with their own lives and it is a sin to take it away. Another point argued is that euthanasia is against nature and it is a human's natural instinct to survive so it goes against the laws of nature. Most doctors are extremely unhappy about having to let a life stop as they take a Hippocratic Oath (names after Hippocrates, the first doctor,) that states they will do everything in there power to preserve life and save people when possible. Doctors argue they cannot go against there promises. Other religions such as the Jewish and the Islamic faiths also agree. The Islamic religion's holy book, the Qur'an, instructs Muslims to "Destroy not yourselves. Surely Allah is ever merciful to you." Another example of the kind of thing the Jewish believe is that "one must struggle until the last breath of life. Until the last moment, one has to live and rejoice and give thanks to the Creator." Furthermore, some religions even believe that suffering is part of life and makes us who we are and makes us closer to God. Pope John Paul II said "It is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms the human souls." Another religious argument against euthanasia is a Christian point and it famously is one of the 10 Commandments. In the Christian bible it states "Thou shalt not kill." People against euthanasia argue that by being given drugs, the end to a life can be made as pleasant and painless as possible.

They also state that when euthanasia goes wrong it can be horribly traumatic for the patient and the family. In some cases, some people have reacted with a lethal injection with violent shakes of there body and muscles. This would not illustrate the point of "Dying with dignity" and would not be a calm and peaceful end to life that they were expecting. Moreover, it must be remembered that although medical science has advanced incredibly over the time, it is still not perfect. The human body is still unknown about how it works. Some patients do in fact recover "miraculously" after being wrongly diagnosed or being considered a miracle. Many people with diseases thinking they are terminal do express wishes to die and anti-euthanasia activists wonder how many of these people will die un-necessarily if euthanasia was legalised.

Another ethical point raised is the abuse of euthanasia when someone takes the law into their own hands. During World War Two the Nazis started using euthanasia against people's own will. This was known as the T4 programme. This was called involuntary euthanasia. It was an attempt to kill off all the Jewish people, handicapped or anyone who was not "healthy" enough. This type of euthanasia was against the patient's will. However, the only difference between this and murder is that it was meant to be for the good of the patient and they would be better off dead. This was also supposed to be for the good of the Aryan race. The Nazis killed an estimated quarter of a million from using involuntary euthanasia against the handicapped. The Nazis justified themselves by stating it was an "act of mercy," however the handicapped people and their families did not agree with this. It is considered that by making euthanasia legal in this country it could spark off a similar situation again and minorities or poor people may be targeted to make Britain "A better place."

To conclude, although many religious groups are against the act of euthanasia, I believe that morally, it would be much worse to let a human being suffer than to obey a religious teaching. I would consider it as a less of two great evils. However I also feel that euthanasia should not be made legal as it would pressure many people and there could be a repeat of T4 programme and although I agree that every life is sacred I feel that any God, whether it Islamic, Christian or Jewish gave us free will and we should be able to use this to help a suffering family member or patient.