

Essay question: Euthanasia is unacceptable. Do you agree?

Outline

I. Introduction

Thesis statement: A lot of people think physician–assisted death or euthanasia should be an option available to a patient; however, others strongly believe that due to many reasons it must not be accepted by society.

II. Body

A. Firstly, there are moral and ethical questions concerning euthanasia.

1. Sacredness of human life
2. Hippocratic Oath
3. Responsibility for deprivation of life

B. Secondly, medical factor plays an efficient role in the decision of ending the life.

1. Probability of doctor's mistake
2. Cases of recovery
3. Insensible judgements

C. Finally, religious aspect is also important.

1. God's will
2. Value of suffering

D. However, proponents of euthanasia have arguments that can prove the sufficient side of the issue.

1. Way to relief

2. Freedom of choice

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, while the supporters insist on permitting euthanasia, opponents are convinced that it should be forbidden.

Euthanasia is unacceptable

Is euthanasia a “Death with dignity bill” or an “Assisted suicide”? (Robinson, 2004, p.1). This question is still raised among those who support and who are against euthanasia. The word itself came from the Greek language with the meaning “good death”, but for the first time the term “euthanasia” was offered by the English philosopher Francis Bacon in the 17th century (*Eugenics, euthanasia, and physician assisted suicide: an overview for rehabilitation professionals*, 2006). Actually, euthanasia has a lot of names, and opponents and proponents call it differently. Nevertheless, from the medical point of view euthanasia is an act of ending life by injecting a special analgetic drug so that a person would die unpainfully. It is often used to relieve unendurable sufferings of a patient or in cases of terminal diseases. Nowadays this kind of dying is not practiced widely. Only Netherlands, Belgium and three states of the USA (Oregon, Washington and Montana) permit to perform the procedure (*Places in World Where Euthanasia or Assisted Suicide are Legal*, n.d.). Other countries do not hasten to make the decision concerning legalization of euthanasia. The reason for that is the controversial side of the issue. A lot of people think physician-assisted death or euthanasia should be an option available to a patient; however, others strongly believe that due to many reasons it must not be accepted by society.

Firstly, there are moral and ethical questions concerning euthanasia. The concept of the value of human life has formed from time immemorial. The subject of the importance of the human beings’ lives was discussed by many theorists, academics and great thinkers. One of them was the German philosopher Immanuel Kant who claimed that a person’s life essence should be considered in itself but not in something else (*Arguments against euthanasia*, n.d.). Besides, according to Kant (as cited in *Arguments against euthanasia*, n.d.) the value does not consist of the things that surround or influence people. Also it does not depend on judgements, actions or thoughts. The existence of the humanity proves the significance of life. The majority of population understand the sacredness of

human life even not in the philosophical view. The morality in the society implies the idea that all human lives are important despite the age, nationality, gender, religion believes or belonging to any social class. That is why physician-assisted death will lead to depreciation of being alive and then to disparaging human dignity. What must also be taken into account is the devaluation of lives of invalids. There are suggestions going out of which some people should not live due to their physical inferiority. Such thoughts come from those able-bodied people who believe that handicapped can not enjoy living; they always suffer and feel an extreme pressure from the public. Euthanasia will not be the right way out of the problem. Killing vulnerable disabled human beings will only show that they have no value. It is out of the moral rules to assume that some lives worth much less or do not worth at all (*Arguments against euthanasia*, n.d.). The main thing is that everybody including people with disabilities is equal and has the same rights to live. Even the fact that children with terminal, physical or mental illnesses have been born verifies that their birth has some meaning; therefore, they must live. So, taking in consideration ethical principles with the acceptance of physician-assisted suicide human life will be devalued and replaced with the belief that death can be a right solution (Smith, as cited in *Should euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide be legal?* n.d.). Another point is that there are certain regulations that doctors consider obligatory. One of such regulations is the interdiction of mercy-killing (Rachels, 1986). It is plainly described in the Hippocratic Oath, which was written by the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates who lived more than two thousand years ago. This document contains basic laws and points of the medical ethics that all doctors have to follow. Basically, the statements "...I will use those dietary regimens which will benefit my patients...and I will do no harm or injustice to them...and I will not give a lethal drug to anyone if I am asked, nor will I advise such a plan..." (*Do euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide violate the Hippocratic Oath?* 2008, p.1) very clearly explains that medic must not take away a patient's life even if the patient has such a wish. That is why many specialists assert that euthanasia contravenes the Hippocratic Oath. For example, judging by the results of the research on

attitudes towards euthanasia among physicians, out of 938 respondents 48% were in the agreement that euthanasia is unethical proceeding while 42% opposed (Cohen et al, 1994). Thus, as the former chairman of the Council on Bioethics L. Kass (as cited in *Do euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide violate the Hippocratic Oath?* 2008) said by swearing physician denies possible killing even in a good purpose because of the fact that human life should be revered, and the Oath interprets this in an understandable way. Furthermore, a doctor carrying out physician-assisted death puts on a big responsibility for deprivation of life. One of the essential characteristics of physicians is an ability to help; therefore, people rely on them. So, there must not be anything that could destroy the trust (Braumin, as cited in *Should euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide be legal?* 2009). Medical care people should not be involved in the assisted death due to the reason that this action affects not only their rights but self-respect as well. As the study showed 74% of the questioned medics, who were against euthanasia, thought that physician's role is incompatible with homicide (Cohen et al, 1994). If somebody wants to die, a doctor does not have to bear the burden and turn into a murderer. In short, doctors must not perform euthanasia because their duty is to save human lives but not take them away.

Secondly, medical factor plays an efficient role in the decision of ending the life. The probability of doctor's mistake, which includes misdiagnosis, unsuitable treatment, unnecessary or wrongly performed surgeries, and also an inaccuracy in prognosis of the future passing of an illness (*Arguments against euthanasia*, n.d.), is one of the several things that can influence a person's choice. He may prefer easy death rather than feel unbearable pain while actually he was a victim of a medical error. There might be no an incurable disease or required medications exist. The statistics shows that in 155 per 1000 cases patients receive wrong diagnosis (*How common is Misdiagnosis?* n.d.). For example, Phil Collins who was diagnosed with cancer was totally convinced that he was really dying; two years later he found out that the doctor's conclusion was incorrect; the director of a

hospital admitted his staff's fault (Phillips, 2009). Meanwhile, in one of the Baltimore clinics the study of J. Hopkins identified that 6 of 535 cancer determination's events were erroneous (*How common is Misdiagnosis?* n.d.). Altogether, every year only in the USA as a result of such mistakes 225,000 people die (*Thirty Logical Reasons Against Physician-Assisted Suicide*, 2009). One more reason why euthanasia should not be used is that there are cases when hopelessly ill patients have recovered. For example, in 2003 when Terry Wallis regained consciousness after a coma in which he was for 19 years, he started to communicate with other people by simple signs; later he even began to talk (*Top 10 Comas*, n.d.). Another case happened in Cairo in 2004 when a young man slipped into a coma due to heavy brain traumas (*Cases of getting out of coma after a long time*, n.d.). According to the article (*Cases of getting out of coma after a long time*, n.d.) this man had spent one and a half year in coma, but after recovery he saved his abilities of speech and movement. Although both events might be regarded as miracles, they were real. What is more, Rachels (1986) points out that scientists are still inventing new medications and ways of curing diseases. This information suggests that what was unable to treat today may be treated tomorrow. Next argument against euthanasia is based on the fact concerning insensible judgements which one can come to being in an unconscious state. A patient might be under depression and thinks about the assisted death as the only possible way to relieve his sufferings. Though a person has the fixed idea that anyhow he will pass away or feel an immeasurable pain, such consequences may not occur. Mental deviations, fear, rapid breathing, temporary anguish or pain are factors indicating a patient's unwillingness to continue living and inability to make right choices (*Arguments against euthanasia*, n.d.). A Chochinov's research (as cited in *Arguments against euthanasia*, n.d.) identified true desire to die only among a small number of people with fatal illnesses. Such people need a psychological help rather than a physician-assisted suicide. Most of them can get over melancholia and look at their lives differently.

Finally, religious aspect is also important. A great amount of people who support some religious believes or classify themselves in certain groups or creeds object to permission of euthanasia. As reported in the research out of the 318 professional physicians who were opponents of the assisted death 56% said that their opinion about immoral side of euthanasia is based on religious views (Cohen et al, 1994). The argument is that the man is not allowed to decide when to end his own or somebody's life. Only God can deprive and give lives, so all human beings have to obey God's will. In Christianity the sanctity of human life is measured by its identity, so terminally ill patients, old ones who are going to die, and those in a permanent vegetative state must be treated as anyone else; their lives are equally valued (*What are Christian perspectives on euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide?* 2009). In addition, according to a prominent Muslim figure Yusuf al-Qaradawi (as cited in *What are Muslim perspectives on euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide?* 2009) euthanasia is considered to be a pure killing that is absolutely prohibited in Islam. Human life is in the hands of Allah, and nobody must interfere into the process of death (Aramesh, as cited in *What are Muslim perspectives on euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide?* 2009). As God is the creator of mankind, no one except him can judge how long a person should live. Moreover, many people devote a particular meaning to suffering. They suppose that it is possible to reach grace, indulgence, and special development of soul. In fact, religions see good and dignified point of it, as a person can achieve remuneration for himself and realize that he has become closer to Christ (Bishop Sullivan, as cited in Rachels, 1986). For instance, a writer S. Peck (as cited in *Arguments against euthanasia*, n.d.) emphasised that when the end of the life is near, by suffering a person can learn 'how to trust... at least a little bit about how to pray or talk to God' (p.3). On the other hand, religions do not deny relieving suffering; however, they can not consider it a help if it leads to death (*Arguments against euthanasia*, n.d.). So, suffering and dying are things from the Creator's plan, and human behaviour and reaction towards them shows the power of faith and trust in God.

However, proponents of euthanasia have arguments that can prove the sufficient side of the issue. In some circumstances euthanasia is a solution to relieve patient's sufferings if they are completely unendurable. During some illnesses a person undergoes terrible pain which others can not understand (Rachels, 1986). Almost all fatal diseases are accompanied by awful twinges. Though there has been a huge advancement in the sphere of medicine, still people have not invented such painkillers that would not let terminally ill patients suffer. Rachels (1986) gives an example about a journalist's experience in sharing a chamber with a man named Jack who had cancer; every four hours Jack got a dose of analgetics alleviating pain only for a short period of time; after the ending of the effect he began to groan and scream. On this basis, the assisted death would be more appropriate for such patients than doctor's attempts to prolong their lives. Likewise, as a personality a patient like anyone else has freedom to choose whether to suffer or not. Nobody has the right to make somebody live if he does not want to because life can be controlled only by that one who owns it. For instance, the European Declaration of human rights guarantees sovereignty, personal liberty, and the opportunity not to suffer (Girsh, as cited in *Should euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide be legal?* n.d.). Yet some people in coma can not ask others to end their lives. Despite this situation a patient may prepare a special document in advance in order to inform about his decision in case of his vegetative state (Rachels, 1986). Such instructions show the physicians' respect to a patient's wishes. Overall, the principle of independence gives a person a power over his body and the chance to make choice.

In conclusion, while the supporters insist on permitting euthanasia, opponents are convinced that it should be forbidden. Both of them have strong arguments and proofs. Those who are against believe in ethical values of human life, refer not only to words from the Hippocratic Oath but also to influential medical and religious factors, whereas defenders of the assisted suicide struggle for the freedom of individuality and reducing sufferings. Personally, I agree with the idea that euthanasia is

unacceptable. Instead of killing hospitals and special institutions had better provide incurable patients with the proper palliative care which includes physical and emotional help.

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