
Assisted Suicide Or Voluntary Euthanasia

The debate surrounding voluntary euthanasia is one that brings into question the ethics of choice and the importance of human life not only to the individual, but to the collective. There are those that argue that the patient should be able to choose for themselves if they believe that assisted suicide is the best option. They can understand that sometimes life is meant to end and by forcing it to continue, they are simply making a peaceful ending more painful. In contrast to this, there are people that believe that life is the purest and most sacred thing, and to voluntarily end that would be equivalent to murder. These people understand that sometimes life is worth fighting for and that it is always better to have the chance of improved health than to take that away. It would be nigh impossible to depict both sides of this discussion fairly without referencing religion and how, in the words of Pope Francis, voluntary euthanasia is "false compassion" and allowing it is an assault on freedom of conscience and religion. However, I believe that this is not a discussion on religion and more about ethical mindsets that an individual may possess. As such, the focus of this essay will not be on religion but rather on the ethical mindsets that allow for a person to agree or disagree with voluntary euthanasia.

In accordance with the theory of Kantianism, the doctor should follow their moral duty. It is a categorical imperative that life is to be held in the highest regard and as such, to take a life in any circumstance must be a breach of moral duty. But it could also be argued that it is the moral duty of the doctor to reduce pain and suffering when available to do so, and as such, assisted suicide is the only morally correct option. A utilitarian approach is somewhat more difficult to approach as it asks whether the life of a person is more important to the person or the people surrounding them. It must be questioned whether the wellbeing of the patients and people that know the patient are held in higher regard than people that merely disagree with the concept. One could also argue that the wellbeing of the doctor is also affected. To have a life weighing on someone's hands could be quite distressing but also, knowing that you are the cause of someone's continued pain and suffering could also have some serious detriments. It could be argued that the patient also has a right to make their own choice. Supporting assisted suicide would mean allowing a patient their freedom of choice. If this line of thinking is to be followed, it would mean that there would be no rational reason for banning the choice of voluntary euthanasia.

An example of voluntary euthanasia in media is the story of Kerry Robertson. In Victoria, voluntary euthanasia was legalised on June 19th 2019, and on July 15th the same year, Kerry Robertson became the first person to use it. She was originally diagnosed with breast cancer in 2010 and despite significant chemotherapy treatment, the disease spread to bones, lungs and brain. In March she had received the news that the cancer had spread further, to her liver, and that the side effects of the therapy would become unmanageable. Her family were supportive of her throughout the whole experience and only wished for a way for Kerry to die in peace and without pain. She was originally unsure whether the treatment would be available to her, as the legislation hadn't yet been passed; but began preparations after she found out. She passed peacefully after her family was given time to say goodbye, which allowed the family to have peace of mind. This story perfectly depicts all the benefits of voluntary euthanasia, the patient, Kerry Robertson, had no other option to turn to, her family were supportive of the decision and were given the peace of mind that a goodbye supplies, she was allowed to pass peacefully

without pain knowing her family would be able to cope with her death.

Another example of voluntary euthanasia comes from a Jewish nursing home in Vancouver. This story is remarkably more controversial as it involves Dr Ellen Wiebe sneaking into Louis Brier Home and Hospital to give a lethal injection to Barry Hyman. He had been suffering from the effects of a stroke and lung cancer and had asked for his life to be ended. It was given the all-clear by medical doctors but the staff of the nursing home refused to allow the procedure on site. This case is more involved because ethically they might have had the right to perform the procedure on Barry, but they didn't have the right to breach the rights of the nursing home to disallow such a procedure on their grounds. The matter was taken to court and they ruled in favour of Dr Ellen Wiebe on the grounds that she had already been given full authority to medically end the life of Barry Hyman. This ruling is still debated fiercely by the home, claiming that it ignored the policies regarding MAID [Medical Aid in Dying], in which performing assisted suicide in a faith-based home is an act of negligence to the other residents in the home. A Kantianist outlook on the whole scenario may side with Dr Ellen, as it was her moral duty to act on the wishes of the patient, whereas a Utilitarian approach may determine that the moral weight put on the other residents of the nursing home is greater than the pain that Barry Hyman was in.

I believe that to a certain extent some actions should not be allowed to be decided by the patient. Things such as an addict being allowed access to drugs, or someone suffering from a serious mental illness being allowed the option of self-harm. While this is true, I still remain firmly in the belief that if a person who is of a stable mind decides that continuing to live would be worse than death, they should be allowed to make that choice for themselves. During this essay, I have tried to remain as neutral as possible, but it was difficult for me to accurately depict the religious arguments as I have no significant religious background.