

Pros and Cons of Euthanasia

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Is mercy killing humane? Do we have the right to assess whether a life is worth living? Should euthanasia be practiced for terminally ill people only or even for the debilitated and mentally ill too?



Euthanasia also known as mercy killing is a way of painlessly terminating one's life with the "humane" motive of ending his suffering. Euthanasia came into public eye recently during the Terri Schiavo controversy where her husband appealed for euthanasia while Terri's family claimed differently. This is a classical case shedding light on the pros and cons of mercy killing. Albania, Belgium, Netherlands, Oregon, Switzerland and Luxembourg are some places where euthanasia or assisted suicide has been legalized. Let's have a look at the arguments that will help us understand the reasoning for / against mercy killing.

Pro Euthanasia Arguments

Legalizing euthanasia would help alleviate suffering of terminally ill patients. It would be inhuman and unfair to make them endure the unbearable pain.

In case of individuals suffering from incurable diseases or in conditions where effective treatment wouldn't affect their quality of life; they should be given the liberty to choose induced death.

Also, the motive of euthanasia is to "aid-in-dying" painlessly and thus should be considered and accepted by law. Although killing in an attempt to defend oneself is far different from mercy killing, law does find it worth approving.

In an attempt to provide medical and emotional care to the patient, a doctor does and should prescribe medicines that will relieve his suffering even if the medications cause gross side effects. This means that dealing with agony and distress should be the priority even if it affects the life expectancy. Euthanasia follows the same theory of dealing with torment in a way to help one die peacefully out of the compromising situation.

Euthanasia should be a natural extension of patient's rights allowing him to decide the value of life and death for him. Maintaining life support systems against the patient's wish is considered unethical by law as well as medical philosophy. If the patient has the right to discontinue treatment why would he not have the right to shorten his lifetime to escape the intolerable anguish? Isn't the pain of waiting for death frightening and traumatic?

Family heirs who would misuse the euthanasia rights for wealth inheritance does not hold true. The reason being even in the absence of legalized mercy killing, the relatives can withdraw the life support systems that could lead to the early death of the said individual.

This can be considered as passive involuntary euthanasia. Here they aren't actively causing the death, but passively waiting for it without the patient's consent.

It can be inferred that though euthanasia is banned worldwide, passive euthanasia has always been out there which can also be called as passive killing and moreover law doesn't prohibit it. Disrespect and overuse of (passive)

euthanasia has always existed and will be practiced by surrogates with false motives. These are the ones who don't need a law to decide for one's life. Present legal restrictions leaves both the incurable patients as well as pro euthanasia activists helpless who approve euthanasia as good will gesture for patient's dignity.

Health care cost is and will always be a concern for the family irrespective of euthanasia being legalized.

Cons of Euthanasia – Reasons Against Euthanasia

Mercy killing is morally incorrect and should be forbidden by law. It's a homicide and murdering another human cannot be rationalized under any circumstances.

Human life deserves exceptional security and protection. Advanced medical technology has made it possible to enhance human life span and quality of life. Palliative care and rehabilitation centers are better alternatives to help disabled or patients approaching death live a pain-free and better life.

Family members influencing the patient's decision into euthanasia for personal gains like wealth inheritance is another issue. There is no way you can be really sure if the decision towards assisted suicide is voluntary or forced by others.

Even doctors cannot predict firmly about period of death and whether there is a possibility of remission or recovery with other advanced treatments. So, implementing euthanasia would mean many unlawful deaths that could have well survived later. Legalizing euthanasia would be like empowering law abusers and increasing distrust of patients towards doctors.

Mercy killing would cause decline in medical care and cause victimization of the most vulnerable society. Would mercy killing transform itself from the "right to die" to "right to kill"?

Apart from the above reasons, there are some aspects where there is a greater possibility of euthanasia being mishandled.

How would one assess whether a disorder of mental nature qualifies mercy killing? What if the pain threshold is below optimum and the patient perceives the circumstances to be not worthy of living? How would one know whether the wish to die is the result of unbalanced thought process or a logical decision in mentally ill patients? What if the individual chooses assisted suicide as an option and the family wouldn't agree?