

Running head: AN EXAMPLE OF FALLACIES USED IN PUBLIC PERSUASION

An Example of Fallacies Used in Public Persuasion.

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Author Note

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## **Abstract**

Human life cycle begins with birth, followed by aging, and then by illness, and death as the final stage. During this life cycle we “fear of very present dangers,” [Bikkhu, 1999]. The worst danger of all is death. For this reason, methods were proposed to provide a peaceful, dignified, and medically controlled death to the terminally ill patients.

These methods are part of euthanasia, which is the “act or practice of killing hopelessly sick or injured individuals (as persons or domestic animals) in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy,” [Merriam-Webster, 2014]. Over the years the medical community had tried to educate both the government and the public about new medical interventions which “have shaped the dying process, giving us options that can impact when, where and how we die,” [Ache.org, 1994].

Many people, including medical professional found euthanasia inhumane because the act contradicts the pledge to save lives which medical professionals uphold at all time. However, there is a fine line between medical professional pledge and the patients’ preferences to their painless end-of-life approach that raised many questions and concerns worth debating. A few arguments techniques were used in this topic that will be the main focus of this paper to identify and analyze them.

## An Example of Fallacies Used in Public Persuasion

### A Logical Fallacy

As stated in the American Medical Association Code of Medical Ethics, “Euthanasia is the administration of a lethal agent by another person to a patient for the purpose of relieving the patient’s intolerable and incurable suffering,” [AMA-ASSN.org, 1994]. The result of this administration is a controlled death that remove intolerable pain from a living human. This act is consistent with the definition of homicide defined in our judicial system. However, through *Argumentum ad logicam* fallacy, our judicial system allowed some form of homicide to be excusable from others. For example, euthanasia administered as a criminal punishment is judicially tolerable regardless of the health of the criminal (who may or may not have a terminal illness) at the time of the execution, whereas, the same act is judicially inexcusable when carried out by a doctor in response to the request of a painfully dying patient. There seems to be an interval of “excusability” justifiable by law, similar to that in mathematic where there exists an interval of integrability. The question is why one form is judicially justifiable and all others are not although both forms are ethically incorrect.

### A Sophistry Fallacy

The American Medical Association members believe that doctors must respect “the principle of patient autonomy”, [AMA-ASSN.org, 1994]. Nonetheless, there was a dilemma in one case where a patient who was terminally ill with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) disease and became respirator dependent without hope for recovery. The patient persistently requested to be extubated and allowed to die, if the physician honored her request by allowing her to die, is the doctor a murderer?

And then, if this patient has a greedy relative who anxiously wants his or her mother to die to avoid dissipation of his or her inheritance by a long hospitalization, that relative enters the patient's room while she was sedated, extubates her, and she dies. When the hospital staff discovers what the relative has done and confronted the relative, he or she replies, "I didn't kill her, I merely allowed her to die. It was her ALS disease that caused her death." This is a transparent sophistry because the relative deliberately killed his or her mother. However, why would it be a criminal act when the relative did the same thing the doctor would have done in honoring the patient's request?

**To be fallacious or not to be fallacious, that is the question.**

In a heated debate like this one, there are ethical reasons to persuade the audience to be fair to both the patients and the doctors. However, it was unfortunate that the definition of homicide was too binary that only justified the act when punishing criminal by members of the judicial system. Because of this binary nature, doctors who perform euthanasia are classified as murderers although what they did was respectful despite the end result. The laws must be revised to take into account the suffering that terminally ill patients endure and provide exceptions as needed. Sometime an inhumane act is the most humane one.

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