Euthanasia

It seems that everyone knows someone who has been diagnosed and died of cancer or another terminal illness. While it is a painful process for the individual with the soon impending death sentence the pain echoes for those close to the individual seeing them in pain. In this paper, I will agree with James Rachels’ assertion that both voluntary active and passive euthanasia are morally acceptable and argue that these practices should be legalized. This is a heavily debated topic, being brought up in multiple states of which three have now legalized physician-assisted suicide however I also believe that individuals must accept the freedom of choice for the individual with an already death sentence and what they want to do with their life.

There are two distinct positions in this argument, one taken by Arthur Dyck with benemortasia and the other with James Rachels’ arguing that active and passive euthanasia is morally permissible. Both arguments have compassion for the painfully and terminally ill as well as concern for human dignity. Benemortasia allows for actions and inactions, which cause or hasten death but never because they cause or hasten death, the death is always a side effect. Active euthanasia is the “deliberate action by a physician to terminate the life of a patient” (Paris 114). Passive euthanasia on the other hand is defined as “the cessation of the employment of extraordinary means to prolong the life of the body when there is irrefutable evidence that biological death is imminent and is the decision of the patient and/or his immediate family” (Rachels: "Active and Passive).

There is a heated debate that active euthanasia is impermissible, as per the American Medical Association, but passive euthanasia is permissible. I personally find, just as Rachels’, that there is no morally relevant difference between active and passive euthanasia. As Rachels’ brings up there is not a morally relevant difference between letting die and killing. Per the example in class, is there a difference between letting a toddler drown in the bathtub and drowning the toddler? I personally, and most people will agree, do not see a difference because you have a moral responsibility to save the toddler in this case. You can argue then saying that you have a moral responsibility to save or at least prolong the life of the individual with a terminal illness to which I say it comes down the freedom of choice of the individual as well as the future they could have. I insist there is a distinction that the toddler has a potential full life ahead of them, however in the case of the terminally ill patient there is mere months left that are predicted to be pain-ridden. The terminally ill patient has the ability and maturity to chose whether they want to endure the pain where also the toddler does not. Arthur Dyck argues that there is too much power given to the physician in the case of active euthanasia and it then potentially could become a slippery slope. While I understand where Dyck is coming from in respect to the slippery slope since he does bring up a good point with Nazi Germany, I still believe that there is a risk of anything becoming a slippery slope from the legalization of medical marijuana, changing the drinking age, legalization of abortion, so on and so forth. Surely, there will be a few cases when a physician goes overboard but from a utilitarian perspective it is permissible still in my eyes. If the overall good of letting someone die with dignity and saving them from their impending painful death outweighs the potential of a few cases where a physician goes overboard and does involuntary or non-voluntary euthanasia then it is still worth it.