Euthanasia

It seems as if everyone knows someone who has either been diagnosed or lost the battle with cancer or another terminal illness. While it is a painful process for the individual with the impending death sentence the pain echoes with those close to the individual witnessing their pain. James Rachels argues that both voluntary active and passive euthanasia are morally acceptable and argue that these practices should be legalized. This is a heavily debated topic brought up in multiple states, three of which have now legalized physician-assisted suicide, however I also believe that individuals must accept the freedom of choice for the individual with a pre-determined 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 are morally permissible. Both arguments have an underlying compassion for the painfully and terminally ill as well as concern for human dignity. Benemortasia allows for actions and inactions, which ultimately cause or hasten death but never because they cause or hasten death. 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 in today’s society regarding the legality of active euthanasia due mainly to the fact that it seems to be inherently immoral. Some say 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 becaue I see no difference in letting die and killing. As Rachels’ brings up there is not a morally relevant difference between letting an individual die and “killing” them. Per the example in class, is there a difference between letting a toddler drown in the bathtub and drowning the toddler? I personally do not see a difference between the two because one has a moral responsibility to save the toddler in this case. You can argue 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 to the freedom of choice of the individual. A major contributing factor to this choice includes the possible future the individual could have. I insist there is a distinction between the toddler that has a potential full life ahead of them and one with a death sentence. However in the case of the terminally ill patient there are mere months of life left that are predicted to be pain-ridden. The terminally ill patient still possesses the ability and maturity to choose whether they want to endure the pain where as the toddler does not. Arthur Dyck argues that there is too much power given to the physician in the case of active euthanasia and that it could therefore potentially 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 (explain point), I still believe that there is a risk of nearly any heavily debated legal issue becoming a slippery slope; from the legalization of medical marijuana, the alteration of the legal drinking age, the legalization of abortion, and so on and so forth. Surely, there will be a few cases when a physician goes overboard but from a utilitarian perspective it is still permissible in my eyes. If the overall good of letting someone die with dignity and saving them from an ultimately painful death outweighs the potential of a few cases where a physician goes overboard and uses involuntary or non-voluntary euthanasia, then it is still for the best.