Arguments against Euthanasia: Analytical Essay

Introduction

In order to understand the controversy involving euthanasia, and the different postures adopted towards it, we should begin with a brief introduction about what this term means and its use.

Euthanasia comes from the Greek term Euthanatos (“good death”). According to the World Health Organization, it is a deliberate act undertaken by one person with the intention of either painlessly putting to death or failing to prevent death from natural causes in cases of terminal illness or irreversible coma of another person. It is categorized in different ways, which include voluntary, non-voluntary, or involuntary. In this essay I will use the term euthanasia referring to the voluntary one.

As we may understand, a frequent discussion involving the medical field occurs, regarding the moral, ethical, and legal issues of euthanasia. Those who are against it, may argue for the sanctity of life, while proponents of euthanasia rights emphasize alleviating suffering, defending the self determination of the patient.

I include myself within the latter group, and I’ll try to give my point of view disputing the different arguments used by the detractors.

Arguments against

· The sanctity of life

- “Life is precious and one should preserve sanctity of life. We all have the right to life”
- Counter-argument: This has no ethical merit. The duty to live doesn’t exist. This “right” does not demand that it must be exercised. This argument leads to unnecessary restraints on Human Rights. Avoiding to acknowledge that every single person has the right to control their body and life. John Stuart Mill, one of the architects of democratic doctrine, stated that ‘Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign’. It is nevertheless not said that all people in such conditions must have voluntary euthanasia, but rather that everybody be permitted to have the choice.

· Incorrect diagnosis

- “Terminally ill patients could be incorrectly diagnosed, so euthanasia must be forbidden”
- Counter-argument: A mistake in the diagnosis could occur, but this possibility shouldn’t be sufficient to disallow euthanasia. In this case scenario the best explanation in my opinion comes from Dr. Alister Browne, who states that ‘it is frequently beyond all reasonable doubt that the diagnosis is correct or some cure will not be discovered in time to help, and it is not clear why this should not be sufficient. The law has never taken a “pigs might fly” attitude towards the risks attendant on any activity. We only need to establish “guilt beyond reasonable doubt” to send a person to prison or even to his

execution, and it is not possible to require more without making the enforcement of the law impossible. Why a more stringent standard should be demanded in the cases of assisted suicide and active voluntary euthanasia yet needs to be explained.'

· Option of palliative treatment

- "Euthanasia is unnecessary due to the recent improvement of palliative care"
- Counter-argument: The palliative care option is a really good alternative, and it certainly decreases the need for euthanasia. Nonetheless, the availability of this option doesn't imply that physician assisted-suicide isn't needed. There are still illnesses for which this alternative isn't sufficient to alleviate all the pain of the patient, nor the loss of dignity that this may lead to. Not all the harm suffered by the patient is physical. There are many psychological factors that should be taking into account. The acknowledgment of death could lead the patient to a state of depression and fear that the palliative care won't be able to take care of.

· Slippery slope

- "Voluntary euthanasia, will invariably lead to the acceptance or practice of concepts which are currently deemed unacceptable, such as non-voluntary or involuntary euthanasia. Thus, it is argued, in order to prevent these undesirable practices from occurring, we need to resist taking the first step."
- Counter-argument: For this claim, there should be some evidence about an increase of non-voluntary deaths within a tolerant, regulated and legalised voluntary euthanasia framework. The same happens with gun control, the slippery slope is frequently used by detractors as a strong rhetorical move, but it's just used as an effort to stop people thinking about the actual purpose. With this I don't want to claim that it shouldn't be regulated anyhow, since we need to establish some parameters to make it as fair as possible for all parts, but the fear of the unlikely and undesirable situation B, shouldn't be a burden to legalise situation A.

Conclusion

In my opinion patients should be given the choice to decide how to live their lives and in this case, how their death should be. I consider that hinder them from making the decision is a violation of their basic human rights.

Euthanasia shouldn't be considered as a deplorable act, since it can help to those who consider that it is no longer worth living in such conditions, to have a dignifying, humane and peaceful death, in order to alleviate their pain (physical and psychological).

I personally don't understand why people put so many burdens to other people when they chose about their own body. Interfering in the decisions of others about themselves represents a lack of humanity, and hampers the correct fulfilment of democracy.