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Ethics and Society

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Essay 3: Is euthanasia morally justifiable

In this essay I am going to give a summary of J. Gay-Williams's paper "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia". I am going to summarize his arguments against euthanasia, then I will proceed to tell you why I disagree with the points he makes and why I believe euthanasia should be allowed. Williams first defines euthanasia as "intentionally taking the life of a presumably hopeless person" (179). Williams argues that euthanasia is wrong; he includes the argument for nature, the argument from self-interest, and the argument from practical effects to persuade his readers. He clarifies that euthanasia can not be an accident, it must be deliberate and intentional. He also states that if a person is suffering from an illness that no medical treatment or medicine can save, therefore no treatment is given and the patient dies it is not euthanasia. He died from the illness not from receiving any treatment. He disagrees with what passive euthanasia is, he feels the phrase "passive euthanasias" is misleading. He states that if someone who has reached a point in their treatment where there is little chance of recovering and the treatment is not improving their situation and it is taken away and the patient dies. This does not count as euthanasia because death was not intended for the patient by withholding the treatment.

His first argument is that all humans have natural inclinations to live. It is our natural instinct to do whatever it takes to live, but by allowing the option of euthanasia to exist it decreases the natural designer that people have to fight for their survival. He states that

“euthanasia does violence to the natural goal of survival. It is literally acting against nature because all the processes of nature are bent towards the end of bodily survival” (179). According to Williams euthanasia is also harmful for our dignity. He explains that dignity is wanting our goals to be successful and if our natural goal is survival euthanasia puts flaws in that goal resulting in our dignity suffering. We use reason and we are conscious of what we want, which is survival. But when euthanasia is involved are natural survival wants are weekend “thus, euthanasia denies our basic human character and requires that we regard ourselves or others as something less than fully human” (179).

Williams argues against euthanasia by making the point that “death is final and irreversible” (179). He also states that “we will work against our own interest if we practice it or allow it to be practiced on us” (180). He explains his claims by giving examples of what he means. He believes a mistake of diagnosis could have been possible. This would lead the patient wanting euthanasia to be done because of the false diagnosis, when in reality they could actually be well and not near death. He also explains that there will always be a possibility of an experimental procedure that could save someone's life. But if they gave up hope and accepted their death by euthanasia one would never know if they actually had a chance at surviving or not. If someone is in a coma and the doctor says there is no chance of the patient waking up, euthanasia still should not be performed because that guarantees death when there could still be a chance of a miraculous recovery. He also points out if euthanasia was allowed it would make people who are suffering from a terrible disease have a chance to give up too quickly by weakening their determination because it provides an easy way out.

The final argument Williams makes against euthanasia is the slippery slope effect. He believes that if doctors and nurses were allowed to administer euthanasia on ill patients this would decrease their desire to save lives. Knowing that euthanasia was allowed doctor will not try as hard to try life saving treatments on their patients because they might feel it would be better off for them to just die and end their suffering. He feels this attitude would also affect people who were not as sick because the attitude of the doctors and nurses toward the seriously sick patients would also be carried down to the less ill. He believes that euthanasia would open up the door for people who have not authorized it to be done on them to have it administered. This would mean patients who are unable to speak for themselves and have not authorized their death by euthanasia to have someone act for them declaring that euthanasia can be done on them. "Euthanasia is not just dying. It is Killing" (181).

Is euthanasia morally justifiable? My personal beliefs would say yes euthanasia is morally justifiable. Even though Williams argues against euthanasia and gives his reasons for doing so. His arguments did not persuade me to change my perspective to disagree with allowing euthanasia to be performed. I feel if a person is suffering in pain from a terrible disease and they want to die, doctors should abide by their wishes and end their suffering.

I do not see Williams's argument for nature to be very strong. His point states that euthanasia does harm to one's dignity because we as humans should be focused on wanting to survive, meaning we should endure any suffering that comes along with that. I feel this is not the case. Most people do want to live their lives to the fullest, but if they are diagnosed with a terminal disease that brings to much pain to them they should not have to live with the suffering because they are worried about harming their dignity. Saving your dignity is not worth slowly

dying in pain. One should have the option to die so they do not have to suffer any longer. I feel it should be up to the patient. I do not see how allowing euthanasia to exist would make people want to give up to easily. By wanting to end your own suffering is not showing weakness or trying to go against nature. It is simply not wanting to endure anymore pain with no real certainty when the pain will end or the illness will be cured.

I believe that Williams's argument against euthanasia on the grounds that there could be an experimental procedure that might save a patient's life is irrational. He argues that doctors could have made a mistake when diagnosing a patient with a terminal disease. I feel this argument is irrational because it is highly unlikely that a doctor would miss diagnosis such a serious illness, because one doctor or nurse does not diagnose patients alone. There is a large team involved in the process making it highly impossible for such a drastic mistake to be made. If there was an experimental procedure that could save a patient's life doctors would know about it. Doctors would not keep such things from their patients who are suffering if the procedure had a chance at saving them. If there was not an experimental procedure at the moment available to patients who were in pain from their illness they should not have to suffer hoping that one might become available. They should have the right to end their suffering not forced to endure it for a chance that probably would not come available to them.

Williams argument against euthanasia because it could become a slippery slope and doctors would not try hard to save lives is inaccurate. To examine this point we can look at other countries that currently allow euthanasia to be performed and see how this has affected their medical doctors. Take the Netherlands for example, they allow euthanasia to patients who are "suffering unbearably" (cbsnews). This has not caused a slippery slope so why does Williams

argue that it does? He also claims that doctors will not try so hard to save patients who are less ill because they will feel the patients would be better off dead. This is not the case because doctors are trained to save lives. Just because euthanasia is legal does not mean the doctors would determine which patients are better off living.

We can take a look at all of Williams's reasons against euthanasia: the argument for nature, from self-interest, and for practical effects; from my summary and analysis we can see that his arguments are invalid. Williams opposes euthanasia, but can not give confident *moral* reasons to why he does. To me it appears that Williams is just grasping for straws when it comes to his arguments against euthanasia. I do not see how any human can look upon another who is suffering and say yes you need to continue suffering, you should not want to die because nature would not want you to or it will harm your dignity. From my perspective I see his arguments to be foolishly naive. When Williams disagrees that passive euthanasia is indeed euthanasia he counteracts all of his coming arguments. He states that when a patient no longer can be treated for their illness because there is little chance of recovery, leading the doctors taking him/her off their treatment in which the patient dies, the death is not considered euthanasia. He says this is not euthanasia because death was not intended for the patient. How was death not intended for the patient? Doctors knew the patient would end up dying if the treatment was taken away, because there was little chance of the patient recovering with the treatment. Therefore this scenario would have to be considered euthanasia. Because of his inconcise points I have to stick with my original statement and agree that euthanasia is morally justifiable.

Works Cited

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