## Euthanasia

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<th>Utilitarianism</th>
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| Bentham (consequences, hedonism, principle of utility, hedonic calculus) | Consequentialist - moral judgements based on outcome, so no objection in principle  
Hedonistic - based on pleasure and pain - these are the only relevant factors  
Principle of Utility - asks about other people affected to (therefore wrong if others suffer more/longer)  
Hedonic Calculus (more concerned here with preventing pain than actual pleasure):  
  - REMOTENESS - pain for the person suffering is far closer than for relatives and others  
  - PURITY - the act of euthanasia may cause pain for doctors and relatives  
  - RICHNESS - people may feel relieved and glad, but equally guilty and angry  
  - INTENSITY - pain suffered may be intense, but so might feelings against euthanasia  
  - CERTAINTY - all future suffering is uncertain yet ending of a life is a certain thing  
  - EXTENT - pain suffered through euthanasia may affect as many people as the pain of watching someone suffer  
  - DURATION - length of suffering is relevant; guilt and negative feelings might endure |  |
| Mill (qualitative, higher & lower pleasures) | Qualitative - pain is a lower pleasure, and therefore carries less weight.  
Mill is more likely to support a person faced with mental degeneration (e.g. Alzheimer’s) than a person with ALS (e.g. Thomas Hyde, whom Dr Kevorkian helped to die aged 30. His body didn’t work but his brain did. Stephen Hawking has this condition)  
Mill considers autonomy and liberty to be of utmost value:  
‘Over himself, over his mind and body, the individual is sovereign’ On Liberty, 1859 |  |
| Act / Rule | Act (Bentham) - no problem in principle. Each situation needs to be assessed. Could include non-voluntary euthanasia (such as in the case of Tony Bland - be aware it’s not clear cut euthanasia)  
Rule (Sometimes associated with Mill) - would look at the effects of a change in legislation. Non-voluntary euthanasia might cause an outcry with people concerned that they might be killed against their will. Even voluntary euthanasia could be a problem - people may feel pushed into euthanasia, so doctors acting for the greatest good may not know what would make the patient happy. If it was allowed as a rule, there may be conditions such as terminal illness, incurable illness and great pain, to avoid these concerns |  |
| Preference: Hare;  
Motive: Sidgwick;  
Interests: Singer | Hare considers the preferences of people rather than happiness. Therefore might rule out non-voluntary euthanasia as the person could be seen to have a preference to be alive rather than not - e.g. Tony Bland. It would be in his interests to keep him alive in case they can do something for him in the future (although could be argued that a person would rather not feel immense pain). In the Bland case there were other preferences which the money used to keep him alive was preventing (weigh up other patients’ preferences) Could be used to argue for euthanasia even when someone isn’t ill.  
By looking at motive, Sidgwick wanted to get away from consequentialism. However, there is an added result here- it is not the action that is wrong (Natural Law’s ‘external act’) but the motive (Natural Law’s ‘internal act’). If you kill with the intention of relieving pain, this is good. If you do it because you stand to inherit millions, this is bad - same act, different motives.  
Singer is interesting here because we have to ask what is in the interests of someone who might be in great pain and terminally ill. It allows us to answer questions where someone is unable to express a preference. However, people will disagree about what is in someone’s best interests. |  |
| Kant | Deontological - We should ignore the consequences when making moral decisions (throwing out most of the arguments for euthanasia) and focus on the act itself. Morality is to do with duty, not happiness. Is killing an innocent human being a good act?  
However, Singer argues that the act is no different from withdrawing treatment. Maybe the act of killing someone who doesn’t want to die is intrinsically wrong, but not euthanasia.  
Our duty is the sumum bonum - supreme good. As we can’t achieve this in our life, Kant reasons that we must have an immortal soul. This may change the way we view the act of euthanasia. |  |
| Importance of Reason | We should ignore feelings of compassion, love and sympathy, as they aren’t relevant to whether an act is right or wrong. We should not count the desires of the patient - again irrelevant to the moral issue. Humans have an intrinsic worth as rational beings, and therefore should not be killed. A person who wishes to die is not acting rationally. Kant strongly believes in autonomy, but he would want to protect those people overcome by pain/emotion who had lost their capacity to reason. |
| CI: Ends in themselves | Says people should be treated as ends in themselves. This is an argument against euthanasia which is a means to an end (the end of removing pain for example). However, as ends in themselves, human autonomy and dignity is essential, so euthanasia might be a way of ensuring that someone can have dignity and self-control when very ill. |
| CI: Universalisability | Another statement of the CI. Makes a demand that we SHOULD do whatever the maxim universalised says. Therefore we should not ask “Is euthanasia right for this individual’ but ‘In similar cases, should we kill a person with these symptoms?’ It would be rare to find a circumstance or condition that demands euthanasia. The alternative view is that we could happily universalise a maxim that said ‘Anyone who is terminally ill, suffering great pain with no hope of recovery, who is in their right mind and voluntarily chooses to die, should be given assistance in committing suicide’. The two questions to ask are: If this was a universal law, would it be self-contradictory? The answer here is no - it could be a law that people in certain situations were assisted in dying. The second question - Would it be a contradiction of the will (i.e. would I choose not to live in such a society)? Some people clearly say it would, as they fear being forced to die against their wishes. Others say no, as they wouldn’t want to live in such a condition. This highlights a flaw in Kant’s ethics. |
| CI: Law of Nature | Very similar to universalisability. Helping someone with ALS to die when they lose the use of their body would be the same as willing that people in that condition just died as a law of nature. If this were the case, Stephen Hawking and many others would just have died long ago. |

### Christian Response

| Bible | Sanctity of life:  
God created man in his own image Genesis 1:26  
You yourselves are God’s Temple and God’s spirit lives in you 1 Corinthians 2:16  
God gives and God takes away Job 1:21  
Thou shall not kill Ten Commandments  
Jesus healed the sick and the dying, he didn’t kill them.  
Jesus suffered greatly, showing that there can be some purpose to suffering.  
Quality of life:  
Jesus came so that people could have life “in all its fullness” John 10:10  
God gave humans free will: You made him ruler of everything you made Psalm 8:6  
Love your neighbour as yourself Matthew 22:39 - sometimes the most compassionate thing might be to help someone die |

Overall the Bible shows that God has a plan for every individual as well as humanity as a whole. Jesus redeemed mankind through his death on the cross. The question for Christians is whether using medication to speed someone’s death could be part of God’s plan. Quality of life arguments are used in discussions about letting someone die, but the discussions are about treatments (some are proportionate, others disproportionate) - the sanctity of life is an absolute, many argue. |

| Churches | The Roman Catholic Church  
1. Totally against euthanasia. Any act which deliberately brings about death is the same as murder.  
2. Does accept using pain killing drugs which are meant to relieve pain, but may shorten someone’s life;  
3. “Ordinary” (proportionate) treatments, e.g. feeding a patient must always continue, but “Extraordinary” (disproportionate) treatments such as a complicated operation that is unlikely to succeed need not be given. Euthanasia is always wrong, but it is also wrong to keep a patient alive at any cost. People should be allowed to die, but only when nature, |
or God, decides. ‘Passive euthanasia’ might therefore be permitted, but Catholics would avoid this term.

‘Euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God’
‘Man’s life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the sole Lord of this life: man cannot do with it as he wills… the sacredness of life has its foundation in God and in his creative activity’ Evagelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life) Pope John Paul II, 1995

The Church of England has been involved in discussions about euthanasia for 30 years, and has reported:
- Sanctity of Life is very important, but doctors should not have to keep people alive for the sake of it, regardless of the quality of life.
- Making the old and the ill feel wanted and valuable is more important.
- Church should do all it can to make the elderly feel important members of society.

God himself has given to humankind the gift of life. As such, it is to be revered and cherished. Those who become vulnerable through illness or disability deserve special care and protection. We do not accept that the right to personal autonomy requires any change in the law in order to allow euthanasia.

Church of England 1999.

Baptist Church is generally against euthanasia. All human life is sacred and worth preserving. Euthanasia is similar to abortion, and raises the same issues - whether people have the right to take away human life.

Baptists agree that when a person is brain dead and experts agree there is no chance of recovery, then it is acceptable to stop treatment and allow the patient to die naturally. Baptists do not agree with actions that make death come more quickly, e.g. a lethal dose of drugs.

Methodist Church
“We need to provide better care for the dying rather than kill them off early.”
Methodist Conference 1974

“I sincerely believe that those who come after us will wonder why on earth we kept a human being alive against his will, when all the dignity, beauty and meaning of life had vanished; when any gain to anyone was clearly impossible and when we should have been punished by the state if we had kept an animal in similar conditions.” Dr. Leslie Weatherhead (leader of the Methodist church)

Virtue Theory

- Aristotle
Aristotle believed we should aim for eudaimonia - happiness, but the sort of happiness resulting from a life in perfect balance. Eudaimonia means we have developed habits of patience, temperance, courage etc. These virtues are perfected so that we may be perfectly happy - not in order to benefit others. People suffering greatly from illness would not be living a eudaimon life. If there was a way to improve their physical well-being, Aristotle would support this. However, where someone is incurably and terminally ill, Aristotle might hope that they would have the courage to accept their fortune. It is not clear whether he would expect someone to have the patience to cope with their condition, or the courage to end their own life. He would say that person achieving eudaimonia would have the wisdom and judgement to make the right decision.

Aristotle was concerned with the good for society above the individual. In those cultures where resources are scarce, euthanasia may well make a huge difference on the well-being of society as a whole. Under these circumstances, it may be a courageous, noble act for someone to take their own life when very ill. Even in our own society, where people are living longer and people with illnesses are surviving when they wouldn’t have before, there may be huge financial benefits to society if those who are unproductive were euthanized. However, it doesn’t seem in keeping with Aristotle’s virtues of patience, modesty, temperance etc.
| ♦ MacIntyre | MacIntyre argued that morality was contextual - you need to look at society to understand our moral behaviour. A hundred years ago people had a strong belief in God and the afterlife, which meant people in great agony only had a short amount of suffering to bear compared with the eternity of peace and joy in heaven if they stayed faithful. In the 21st Century, views have changed. People are less accepting of moral absolutes, and people question the authority of the church and state. Many people feel that individuals should be given the freedom to make their own choices. MacIntyre helps us to understand the choices made by individuals and why there is pressure to change the law of the land. As a relativist, he cannot tell us whether individuals are morally RIGHT to choose euthanasia, or whether changes in legislations SHOULD be allowed. |
| ♦ Ben Franklin | For Franklin, we are virtuous because it makes the world a better place. When considering the courage of a husband who breaks the law to help his wife die compared with the courage of a lady suffering in great pain who refuses to consider euthanasia, we would ask which of these led to a better world. Essentially, this is little more than a straight utilitarian question. |
| ♦ Foot/Anscombe/Williams | These three are thought of as relativist. They would argue that, in Eskimo society, it is a noble thing for an elderly person to walk out onto the ice when they are no longer productive. In our own society, if a man put pressure on his father to end his life rather than becoming a burden, we would see this as selfish and cowardly. You cannot say that a virtuous person would support euthanasia, as it would depend on which culture they were from. |
| ♦ Nussbaum | Nussbaum argues that Aristotle was asking us what it means to be a good human - not a subjective or relativist position. |
| Natural Law | God created us for a purpose (to know & love him) - euthanasia goes against this. Euthanasia would be an apparent good - it may seem the right thing to do but it does not draw us closer to God and gives us a sense of moral guilt. Man’s first precept, according to Aquinas, is self-preservation. The other precepts, concerning our purpose in life, cannot be served by prematurely ending our lives. Reason identifies ‘natural’ or ‘cardinal’ virtues - these include fortitude, which should be shown by people who are suffering greatly. Traditional utilitarian arguments focus on pleasure/pain - but these can’t be the end or purpose of humans as animals experience them. |
| Situation Ethics | Demands that we ‘push our principles to one side and do the right thing (St Louis cabbie). Fletcher claimed that Jesus lived by the principle ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. In many cases, euthanasia is the most loving compassionate thing to do, and we should ignore the rules of the Catholic church or the rules of the Bible. However, Situation Ethics is not ‘Antinomian’ (a system that has no rules and treats each situation as unique). They have rules or principles which they live by, but these can be set aside if love is better served by doing so. |
| ♦ Holy Spirit, Prayer and Personal Conscience | Individual cases require prayerful consideration. While we are ‘temples of the Holy Spirit’, we should use this spirit to decide upon issues that fall outside scripture. Many lay Christians support euthanasia. Hans Kung, a well-known Catholic theologian argued: ‘... as a Christian and a theologian I am convinced that the all-merciful God, who has given men and women responsibility for their lives, has also left to dying people the responsibility for making a conscientious decision about the manner and time of their deaths’ James Gustafson (Christian theologian) said: ‘Life is a gift, and is to be received with gratitude, but if life becomes an unbearable burden there is reason for enmity toward God’ Others say that suicide (and therefore euthanasia) reflects a lack of gratitude and faithfulness towards God, and a lack of trust in Him. |