

Euthanasia

Introduction

The topic of euthanasia is very widespread throughout the world. I chose this topic because this issue is very interesting and I would like to make the readers more familiar with this issue, even though it is prohibited in the Czech Republic.

In the essay, I will focus on what euthanasia means and what types of euthanasia there are.

I will also explain in which countries and to what extent euthanasia is allowed.

Finally, I will present considerations for and against the use of euthanasia.

Text of the essay

Euthanasia is a very current and discussed issue, especially due to its ambiguity from an ethical point of view. The view from the ethical point of view of euthanasia can be different and everyone can have a different opinion on euthanasia. There are concerns about the misuse of euthanasia, sometimes also the opinion that human life should not be ended under any circumstances and that no one should assist in ending it. On the other hand, it is held that prolonging the suffering of a terminally incurable person who cannot commit suicide himself and asks to end his life is entirely appropriate, provided that euthanasia is carried out in a country where it is legal and under strict legal criteria. So is euthanasia ethical or not? The answer is yes and no, it just depends on the point of view.

Characteristics of Euthanasia

The meaning of the word euthanasia is of Greek origin "eu" meaning good and "thantos" meaning death. Previously, euthanasia meant helping a dying person aimed at alleviating the pain and anxiety associated with an incurable disease. Today, it can be considered as intentionally hastening the death of the patient at his or her family members' wishes. Euthanasia is often defined according to prof. J. Vozar, who defines the concept of euthanasia as the conscious termination of the life of a terminally ill person, fully capable of legal actions at his request. Furthermore, euthanasia can be defined as intentional killing with the aim of shortening life in order to alleviate suffering at the request of the patient. Euthanasia involves

many difficult aspects such as religious, moral, medical, and non-medical aspects. (Vozar, 1996)

Forms of euthanasia

Euthanasia, in the sense of killing a person, has many forms, which can be different, but at the same time can be intertwined. The most common division of euthanasia is into active and passive. Euthanasia, however, can also be unsolicited or involuntary. (Euthanasia Definition, 2022)

Active euthanasia

Active or direct euthanasia consists in the administration of a lethal preparation at the patient's request. This type of euthanasia is also referred to as the overflow syringe strategy. It is based on the principle of direct intervention in the patient's life and has the effect of shortening suffering. This euthanasia is based on the patient's request, which is arbitrary. Euthanasia is performed by a lethal agent administered to the patient. (Haskovcova, 2007)

Passive euthanasia

Passive or indirect euthanasia is the interruption of treatment that keeps the patient alive. We can refer to this type of euthanasia as a diverted syringe strategy, when treatment is interrupted, devices are disconnected or drugs that keep the patient alive are discontinued. This type of euthanasia is better accepted than the active type and has more support in the field of law. (Anderson, 1998)

Assisted suicide

Assisted suicide is a certain term for euthanasia, which is requested by the patient himself and is carried out by administering a lethal agent with the help of a doctor, but the patient must administer the lethal dose himself according to the instructions given by the doctor. (Anderson, 1998)

Unsolicited euthanasia

This type of euthanasia is the same as active, with the difference that the patient cannot request euthanasia himself because he was unable to give consent. There may be a possibility that he would wish to be euthanized. (Anderson, 1998)

Involuntary euthanasia

Involuntary euthanasia is performed even without consent and the theory that the patient would be interested in it. This type of euthanasia can be classified as manslaughter or murder. (Anderson, 1998)

Countries with legalized euthanasia

Netherlands

The Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalize euthanasia in 2002. The Netherlands is one of the more benevolent countries in Europe, so it is not surprising that it was the first to legalize euthanasia. Even before the actual legalization of euthanasia, a tendency towards its implementation could be observed. In the Netherlands, it is allowed for people over 16 years of age, who are completely autonomous. Due to the current legal standard, a doctor who ends a human life undertakes to immediately report to the public prosecutor after the execution. Reporting does not result in a crime. There are certain criteria for using euthanasia.

- The request must come only from the patient and must be free, well thought out, firm and irreversible.
- The medical condition must cause the patient unbearable suffering with no prospect of improvement.
- The patient is well informed about his health condition and his prospects.
- Euthanasia must be a last resort. All alternatives to alleviate the patient's situation must be considered and sought.
- Euthanasia must be performed by a doctor.
- The doctor must consult with at least one other doctor who has experience in this field and who has examined the patient. (Verhagen. 2005)

Belgium

In Belgium, Euthanasia was legalized in 2002. It was the second country in which euthanasia was legal. Legalization was carried out in Belgium according to the law on euthanasia. For euthanasia, there are certain conditions that the patient must meet.

- The patient is an adult or declared an adult, capable and sane at the time of submission of the request for euthanasia.
- The request is formulated voluntarily, at discretion and repeatedly and is not the result of external pressure.
- The patient is in a state of health in which he suffers permanently intolerably physically or psychologically and this suffering cannot be alleviated, and such state of health arose as a result of an accident or a pathological condition that is serious and incurable. (Doctor, 2014)

Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, euthanasia was legalized in 2009. This law protects doctors who perform euthanasia from prosecution. A condition for euthanasia is a request submitted by the patient. Countries where euthanasia is illegal. (Doctor, 2014)

Switzerland

Switzerland has a different legal norm. Direct killing of the patient is not allowed here. Euthanasia has never been legalized in Switzerland, but it is tolerated here. There is an institute where there is passive assistance to kill. Passive assisted dying means that patients are mixed with poison by a doctor, but they have to drink it themselves. If the patient was unable to drink the poison himself and it was given to him by a doctor, it would be a crime of murder. (Doctor, 2014)

Germany

Germany takes a similar approach to euthanasia as the Czech Republic. Killing another person even if they are terminally ill is considered a crime. The only euthanasia allowed in Germany is indirect euthanasia. In Germany, criminal euthanasia is not passive. In the case of incurable diseases, if the patient does not want further treatment, high doses of opiates can be given to

relieve pain. Thanks to opiates, the patient is unconscious and dies of respiratory failure. Active direct euthanasia is prohibited in Germany. (Doctor, 2014)

Great Britain

Euthanasia is outlawed in both Great Britain and Wales. Assisted suicide is also a criminal offense here. Anyone who carries it out faces up to 14 years in prison. Just like in the Czech Republic, direct euthanasia is referred to as murder. All proposals to legalize euthanasia have been rejected in Great Britain. (Doctor, 2014)

France

In 2005, passive euthanasia was legalized in France. Here, it allows doctors to withdraw from the treatment of the patient only if he is terminally ill and is being artificially kept alive. The patient must be able to perceive the whole situation. If the patient is unconscious, doctors follow their last will, which was expressed in a state of full consciousness. Even if the patient has wished for euthanasia, doctors cannot withdraw from treatment that relieves pain. (Doctor, 2014)

Austria

In Austria it is very similar to Germany. Assisted suicide is punishable by imprisonment from 6 months to 5 years. (Doctor, 2014)

A consideration for euthanasia

If there are criteria on which possible legalization is based, they are precisely ethical criteria. When evaluating euthanasia from an ethical point of view, it is necessary to take into account values such as justice, compassion for a terminally ill patient, the need to help such a patient from suffering or the dignity of death. Doctors are not acting unethically if they comply with a patient's wish to discontinue treatment in the terminal stage of the disease. But what about the pain that accompanies the patient's disease? Is it ethical to let such a person suffer, even if this is what he himself wanted? So is it perfectly okay to watch a patient die in excruciating pain? Although this act is legally defensible, there are certain doubts from an ethical point of view.

Consideration against euthanasia

The main argument that almost every opponent of euthanasia has in mind is the possibility of its abuse. Yes, it is reasonable to fear such an action that could lead to the benefit of killing someone else. Presumably, euthanasia would become a tool for killing certain individuals, either for financial gain or because they witnessed a crime. One would expect that the number of suicides would increase. Euthanasia could also become a means of covering medical malpractice. Through it, medical practice procedures or neglect of care could be covered up. There would not be abuse of euthanasia only from the outside. Thus, euthanasia could be used as an excuse for actions that caused the patient's death, even if it was not caused by a serious illness. The wrong treatment could become a murderous tool.

Conclusion

As I already mentioned here, it is important not to confuse certain types of euthanasia. In every country there is some difference, sometimes even slight one. Euthanasia of any kind is prohibited in the Czech Republic.

Euthanasia is a widely discussed and problematic topic worldwide. However, there is a great effort to fight for its legalization.

A good solution would be to legalize euthanasia, in all countries, but under certain and strict conditions intended for this. Thanks to this solution, patients with an incurable disease in the terminal stage would not have to suffer in pain.

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